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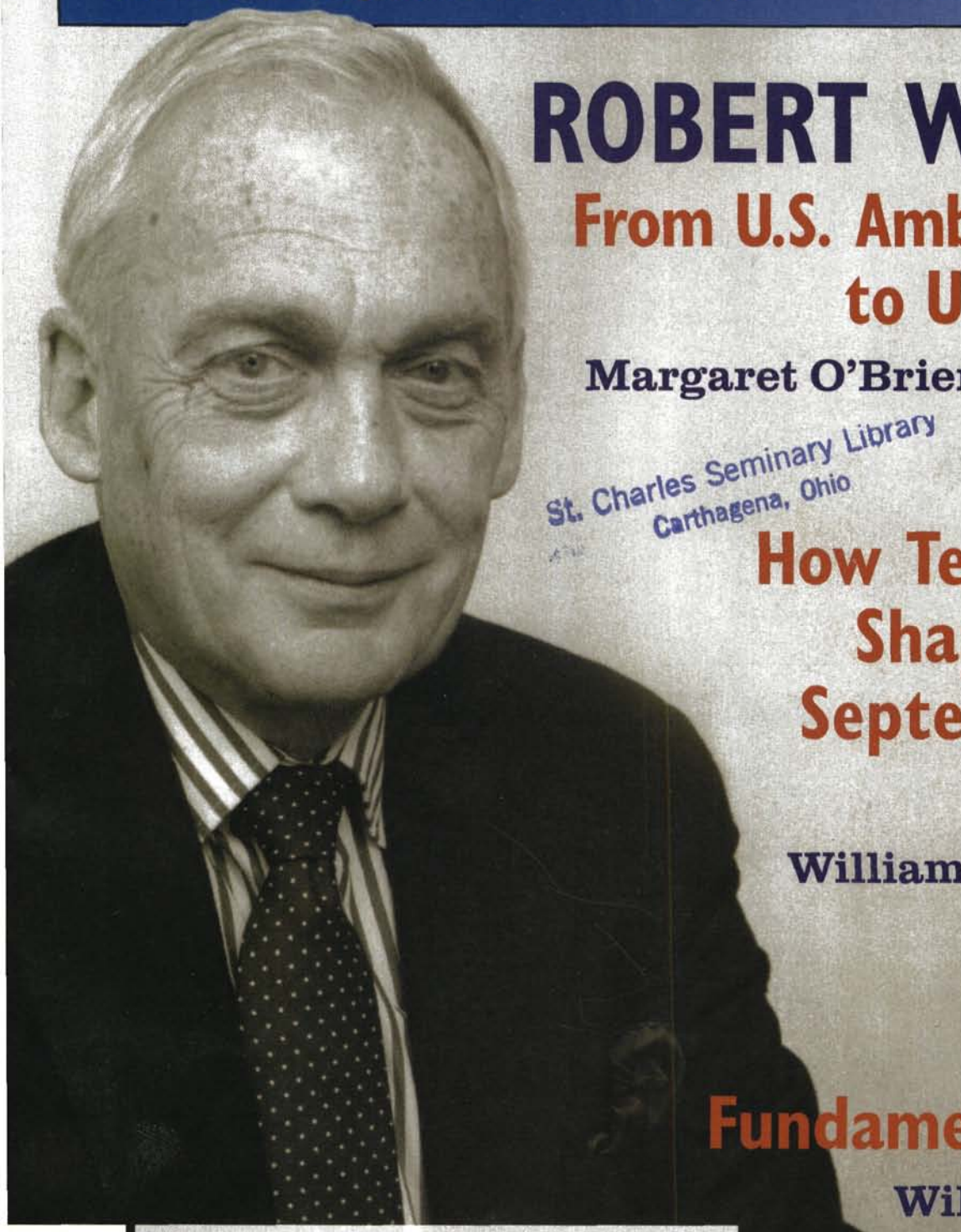
A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

October 26, 2001



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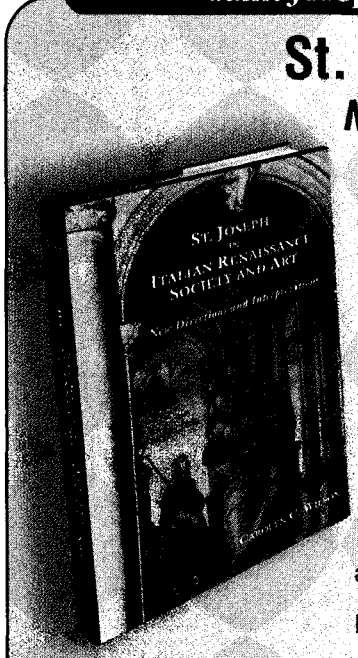

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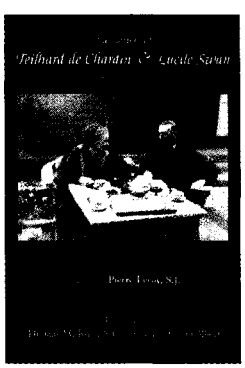

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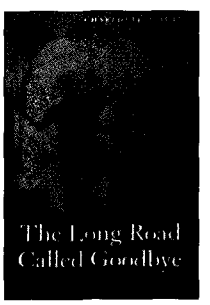

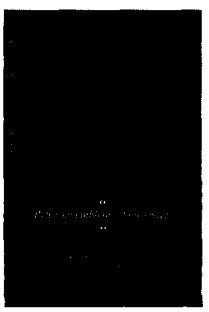

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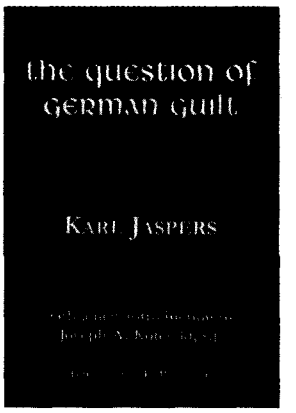

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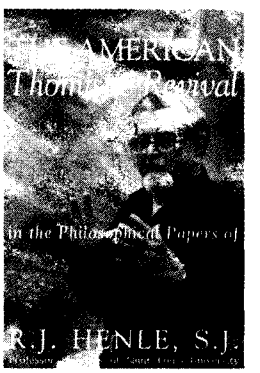

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Excellent work

Congratulations to the editors for providing (in the September 28 issue) the best articles I have read since the September 11 attack. I praise the descriptive talents of Staten Islander Patrick Jordan ("WTC") and Manhattanite Grant Gallicho ("How It Felt"). Robert White's column ("What Kind of 'War'?") is the best among excellent pieces. Thanks for the insights.

JOE MCMAHON
Seaford, N.Y.

Cancel my subscription

Your September 28 issue is an outrage. To use the opportunity of the tragic events of September 11 as an excuse to attack the Bush administration goes way beyond anything I thought even you would stoop to.

Page 4: In the editorial, "September 11, 2001," you write: "Bush's unsteady performance in the aftermath of the bombings has done little to create greater confidence in his judgment and leadership." Either you guys live on a distant planet or in the bowels of the *New York Times*. Out here in the USA, citizens of all colors, faiths, and political persuasions are in strong support of the president's actions and speeches.

Page 4: "Certainly this administration's boastful unilateralism and naive isolationism now stand exposed as folly." Except for a few ultra-left-wing magazines, these charges have been pretty well disposed of. Even mainstream journalists like Georgie Ann Geyer have praised this administration for withdrawing from the Durban conference because it had been hijacked by Middle Eastern extremists.

Page 7: William Pfaff's column was headed "Beware the Jackals," and the jackals turn out to be our own military planners, not the bastards who killed five thousand innocent people. His final paragraph, intimating that we somehow deserved this tragedy, is unspeakably twisted and sick.

Page 8: Peter Steinfels writes, "Colin Powell and Dick Cheney, with their command of detail, do educate the public about complexity. The president is in charge of cheerleading, which he carries out unevenly." Does Peter have an entire edition of the *New York Times* in his mouth or only the editorial page?

I could go on with other examples, but why bother? If it was the intent of the terrorists to divide the American public and drive a wedge between the people and their leaders, then they scored a direct hit at 475 Riverside Drive.

Cancel my subscription.

ED GROSZEWSKI
Rochester, N.Y.

Red, white & blue

Reading the September 28 issue of *Commonweal* was a cause for concern to this reader. As I read the editorial, replete with initial detestation of the horrific attacks on our country followed by the inevitable putdowns of President George W. Bush, I became increasingly uncomfortable with your bashing of Mr. Bush and our military leaders. Clearly a number of "free thinking" (read: "liberal") people have jumped at the apparent opportunity to renew their criticism of the Republican administration. Fortunately, there are vast numbers of people in the country who would disagree with your contention that Mr. Bush has "done little to create greater confidence in his judgment and leadership." It seems that even some of his most bitter critics on the Democratic side of the House and Senate have lauded him for his handling of the situation. Then again, maybe they are just faking it, realizing that their constituents would not be pleased if their representatives gave vent to opposite feelings. How wise those politicians can be! As one Democrat put it, we are not now Republican and Democrat, we are red, white, and blue.

The bottom line is that most Americans, even those one might consider truly Christian and forgiving, find it quite appropriate to support the president and laud his handling of the situation, despite some obvious mistakes such as his use of the words "vengeance" and "crusade."

This is America, the home of the free and the brave. Recognizing this, I have learned to appreciate the honesty of *Commonweal*, which includes a subscription insert in the magazine which states in bold red print, "Catholic, Liberal, and Opinionated." You bet!

EAMON MAGEE
Kensington, Md.

The editors reply:

Despite incurring Ed Groszewski's displeasure and losing his subscription, we stand by our September 28 editorial. We should add that the editorial was written before President George W. Bush delivered his eloquent speech to Congress. Even Bush's staunchest political allies admit that it took the president a few days to gain his footing in the aftermath of the attack. Groszewski's other points can be addressed in order. Suffice it to say that before September 11 the Bush administration was unilateralist and isolationist (on missile defense, environmentalism, humanitarian intervention, etc.); after September 11 it is no longer either. William Pfaff addresses Groszewski's concerns on page 9. Anyone who thinks Peter Steinfels's views are interchangeable with those of the *New York Times*'s editorial board is not a careful reader.

Commonweal will continue to criticize President Bush when we think it warranted and praise him when, in our judgment, he deserves it. Our country's true interest is better served by thoughtful criticism than by knee-jerk approbation.

We thank Eamon Magee for his thoughtful letter.

(Continued on page 29)

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COMMONWEAL

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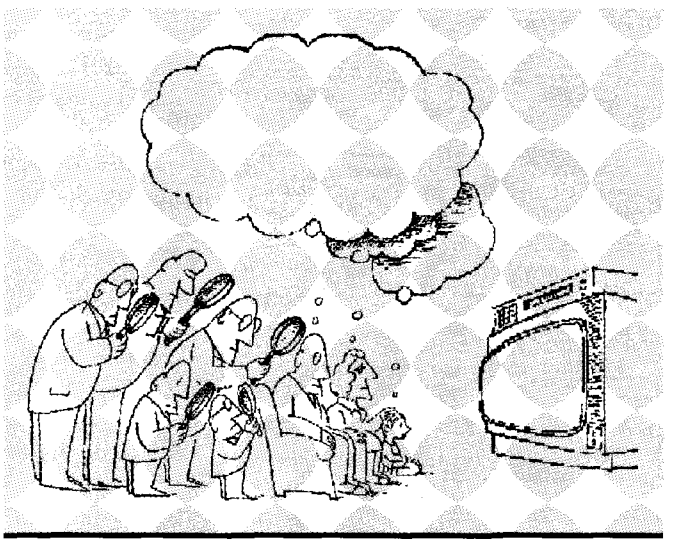

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So far...

Most Americans have never lived through a time like this. Who of us could have imagined our current state of anxiety and outrage a mere two months ago? Seven weeks after a terrorist attack on the U.S. mainland that killed more than five thousand civilians, the nation is poised between war and a disorienting sense of stasis. For most, life continues much as it was before September 11, at least outwardly. At the same time, National Guardsmen patrol the nation's airports and U.S. and British aircraft are conducting daily bombing raids against Afghanistan's Taliban regime and terrorist leader Osama bin Laden's training bases. As we write, President George W. Bush has alerted the nation to intelligence reports that warn of the heightened possibility of another attack. On television, Osama bin Laden and his associates threaten more murder, urging Muslims to stay out of planes and skyscrapers. Across the country, a species of biological warfare is being conducting through the mail, resulting in one death and widespread fear. Is the anthrax scare merely a copycat crime, or is bioterrorism the next step in some larger coordinated offensive?

There is little sense of where this crisis is likely to go, although there is a growing recognition that the threat will not end soon. Perhaps not since the Cuban missile crisis have Americans been forced to contemplate the unthinkable in such a direct and personal way. It is not just the fear of another airplane hijacking or random poisoning, but the possibility that events will spiral out of control—in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, or elsewhere—resulting in a wider war and even nuclear confrontation. Some have suggested that the effort needed to defeat the terrorists is analogous to the cold war, a decades-long battle of nerves that will test both our determination and our flexibility. That is almost a welcome prospect in light of other possible outcomes. Still, it would be well to remember that, despite the justice of the cause, the United States made plenty of mistakes during the cold war (see "Death and Lies in El Salvador," page 12), and it will take a sure sense of moral limits if we are not to betray our own values in resisting a dangerous and unquestionably evil enemy. Are the authoritarian and corrupt allies we have today in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere worth the price we will pay in alienating the democratic aspirations of their people? Can an alternative to Saudi corruption be created that doesn't lead to theocratic fanaticism?

Facing such difficult choices, the nation has been reassured by the manner in which Bush and his administration have responded. After some initial stumbles, the president has appeared steady as well as alert to the complexity of the situation. He has begun to prepare the American people for possible sacrifice, although there are questions about how fairly that sacrifice will be shared. Bailing out airline companies that are simultaneously laying off tens of thousands of workers isn't an encouraging sign. On the other hand, the administration has shrewdly assembled an international coalition, including most of the Arab states, to support U.S. actions. Similarly, Bush has resisted the urgings of some to widen the war against terrorism to Iraq. He has been painstaking in differentiating between the terrorists and Islamic society as a whole, emphasizing that this is not the religious war bin Laden so desperately desires. Initial military operations appear to have

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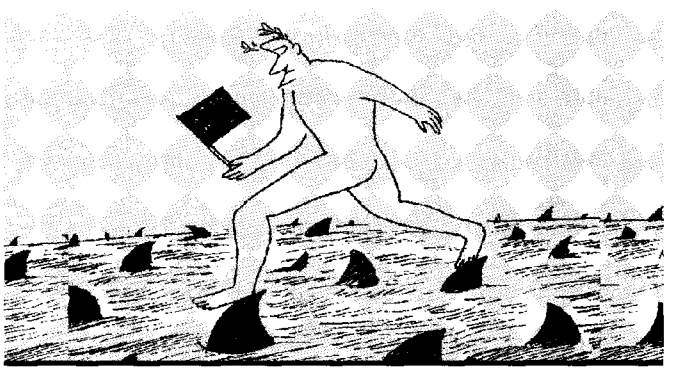
been as scrupulous as possible about minimizing civilian casualties, and have been coupled with a massive effort to get food to the hundreds of thousands of refugees now fleeing Afghanistan. Serious questions remain, however. How stable is Pakistan's military regime? How secure are its nuclear weapons? Can the United States and its allies win the propaganda war for Muslims around the world?

Few have missed the irony of how Bush, who scoffed at the idea of international initiatives during the first months of his presidency, has embraced the necessity and efficacy of multilateral coalitions and action. Engagement with the world—even a measure of "nation building"—is now on the administration's agenda. Nor is it difficult to miss the irony of how this staunchly conservative Republican is defending the federal government's role in a myriad of tasks, from airplane safety to economic stimulus to public health. As anyone who was in New York during the attacks knows, we are all dependent on government in countless ways, and the senseless denigration of government's legitimate role is a hobby for idlers, not serious citizens or presidents.

In that context, the reemergence of partisan differences in Washington is welcomed. Democrats in Congress have rightly shown deference to the administration's initiatives in the last few weeks. But if politics as usual has ceased, politics should not. Democrats have a responsibility to raise concerns about safeguards for civil liberties in antiterrorism legislation and the details of the economic stimulus package. Neither Democrats nor Republicans should resort to the canard that political opposition aids the enemy.

A similar sense of responsibility should make itself felt in the intellectual community. While not condoning the attacks, some, predominantly on the left, have sought to explain the terrorists' motives as reactions to the turpitude of American foreign policy, or the oppression of the world's poor, or as no different from the military actions of the United States. What goes around, some say, comes around. Liberals especially should be loud and clear in rejecting such "explanations." In targeting unarmed civilians, terrorism forfeits any right to a hearing about supposed grievances. "The only political response to ideological fanatics and suicidal holy warriors," writes political philosopher Michael Walzer, "is implacable opposition."

Of course, the strength of that opposition will continue to depend on the justice of our own actions.



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ET CETERA

The whole picture ■ How will our public memory of the September 11 events be formed? Do the indelible images of destruction and mayhem seen on television and in newspaper photographs suffice? Will "the mastering of reality" (to borrow critic and novelist Gabriel Josipovici's terms) be restricted to "the compulsive repetition of gestures and clichés"?

What we need are reflective, considered voices. And plenty of them. From two archives come calls for such voices, calls that capture the moral imagination.

The Massachusetts Historical Society, the oldest such society in the United States, has solicited its elected members for written reflections on September 11. Given the vast record promised by print and video culture, what might this slender file of notes by distinguished academics, archivists, historically minded public servants, and public intellectuals add? Vital things we hope: A memorial written in the light of history, idiosyncratic no doubt, and probing, one would expect. More important, it represents an effort to appropriate the moral enormity of the September 11 events on a more human scale by the application of individual intelligence.

In England, the Mass-Observation Project at the University of Sussex has just asked 450 writers to keep a thematic diary reflecting on the attacks, as well as the unfolding political and military aftermath. Mass-Observation has been

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in this business for a while. Begun in 1937, to construct "an anthropology of ourselves," Mass-Observation founders solicited average Britons to keep diaries of everyday life in monthly installments. Five hundred volunteers emerged. And so did an unexpected archive, when history intervened. Diarists wrote most faithfully during WWII, creating what has been called "the richest source of material available to social historians of the period."

One archive is elite, and the other demotic. That's all to the good. Democratic pluralism is essential to both history and public memory.

Memory dedicated to "the mastering of that which is painful," rather than the "masochistic turning of the screw of pain" certainly will help each of us recover our balance—and keep it. But more than our individual sanity is at stake. Our future political actions depend on how public memory is shaped. Much depends on getting the whole picture, and that includes the unseen picture.

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Continuing the conversation

Power & powerlessness Susan Sontag in the *New Yorker* (September 24) said that the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was the consequence of actions by "the world's self-proclaimed superpower." Daniel Maguire of Marquette University writing in *Catholic New Times* (October 7) characterized the American response as "the vapid answer of an arrogant national culture which has lost its talent for healthy guilt." For some leftist critics of U. S. policy, September 11 was punishment for the cardinal sin of power and pride reflecting Lord Acton's dictum that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

But consider the obverse of Acton's terse observation: *powerlessness corrupts and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely*. It is a commonplace that powerlessness leads to social pathologies such as addiction and crime. Just as suicide may be the final capitulation to personal powerlessness, terrorism may be the ultimate nihilistic political act. Terrorism may be the absolute corruption of absolute powerlessness.

We feel ill at ease thinking that powerlessness corrupts because we assume that corruption occurs only where there is some power to do good. The powerful could do good but, being corrupt, they use power in the wrong way. The powerless lack capacity to do almost anything and so their destructive acts are regarded as mere matters of compulsion. However one might refine these observations about the corruptions of power and the compulsions of powerlessness, the two slogans sum up a certain pessimism about human behavior. From a Christian standpoint, it may be no more than a reminder of the pervasiveness of sin across the spectrum of power and powerlessness.

If slogans about power and powerlessness express a somber view of human history, it is illuminating to see how they fail in sacred history. In the case of the divine, absolute power does not corrupt absolutely because God is absolute power and absolutely good. In the Christian story, the obverse proposition is also rejected. The story of Jesus of Nazareth shows that absolute powerlessness does not corrupt absolutely. Living in a society dominated by an arrogant and ruthless superpower, Jesus rejects the terrorist tactics of the Zealots. On the cross Jesus is revealed as absolutely powerless—he even asks whether God has forsaken him. Forsaken, he cannot and does not call for God's vengeance; rather, he asks that his persecutors be forgiven. If God as absolute power is good, Jesus crucified as absolute powerlessness is also good. That he resists the all-too-human compulsions or corruptions of powerlessness could be sign enough that his was a divine life.

It does not take great insight or effort to catalogue the failures of American culture and political policy. No doubt many of the sins of the state arise from the blindness of power, but for all that this superpower is not supercorrupt. The United States is not "the Great Satan." Our domestic critics see the United States as a perverse superpower in concluding that we could be that superlatively wicked, that any nation could be that good at being bad.

Given the temptations of power and powerlessness, one could characterize the right and left critics of our response as follows. The right militarists, impressed by the power of all our shiny weapons, are frustrated that they are not used to eliminate the foreign bastards who are threatening the country. The left intellectuals, impressed by the power of their bright ideas, are frustrated that these ideas are not used to eliminate the domestic boobs who are running the country. What interests me is how the self-proclaimed powerlessness of the left intellectuals results in a sort of terrorism of the very concepts that are essential to any reasonable discussion of ethics and politics.

Let me offer one egregious comparison. Susan Sontag has

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been roundly criticized for rejecting the characterization of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon as "cowardly acts." On the contrary, she argued, the "pilots" of the planes were courageous, willing to give their lives for a cause. She contrasted them to U.S. pilots who bomb whole cities from the safe impunity of thirty thousand feet. There is something to be said for her view—but not much!

Aristotle had it right when he said that virtue was a mean between excess and defect. One opposite to courage is cowardice, but another is rashness, foolhardiness. It is possible to have too little fear as well as too much. How do we decide? Aristotle again: "as the person of ethical wisdom would decide." Religious fanaticism overrides ethical wisdom so that the truly fearful—killing the innocent—becomes not fearful at all. If the terrorist pilots were courageous, so were the youngsters who carefully planned and executed the attacks at Columbine High School.

The current situation for the United States poses special temptations for Christians. Hanging the country on the framework of sacred history can cast America as either the Great Satan superpower or the Suffering Servant who should refuse power. Realistically, the country is not the former, and it is doubtful that it could or should pretend to the latter. Virtue in this case will be "in the middle" between excess and defect of power. We should hope for ethical wisdom to discern the mean. □

Dennis O'Brien *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

WILLIAM PFAFF

SEEDS OF WAR

What drives Islamic fundamentalists

The same Islamic fundamentalism that inspires Osama bin Laden is shared by the two Muslim states that are the United States' most important allies in its war against terrorism. Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy ruled by the Wahhabi religious movement, which is at the source of modern Islamic fundamentalism. The military government of Pakistan is heavily under the influence of the same fundamentalist convictions that animate the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Osama bin Ladin, accused leader of the group responsible for the September 11 terrorist outrages in New York and Washington, is a Wahhabi—one who believes that his religion has been betrayed. This Islamic reform movement originated in Arab resistance to Turkish rule in the eighteenth century. In the early twentieth century, it overturned the orthodox Hashemite dynasty of Saudi Arabia and took control of all the Arabian peninsula. Its leader then was Ibn Saud, and his puritanical and intolerant Wahhabi version of Islam became and remains the religion of Arabia.

It is officially intolerant of any other religion, enforcing a fanatically puritanical social order in which women are excluded from public life and primitive punishments are imposed for violations of traditional law. Mr. bin Laden's terrorist campaign is not primarily directed against the United States—which he expects eventually to collapse on its own, as a result of what the fundamentalists see as its decadence. Their aim is to unseat the Saudi Arabian elite that has permitted an "infidel" United States to install itself in the nation of the Islamic Holy Places.

This is why the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is so uncomfortable today. Washington is reluctant to talk about it because the United States is heavily dependent on Arabian oil, and the Saudi leadership is silent because it depends on American protection. Washington has heavy po-

"I hope the FBI is watching."

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litical and military commitments to Saudi Arabia, while it has turned a half-blind eye to the Saudis' promotion of their radical and utopian version of Islam among the Taliban in Afghanistan, elsewhere in the Middle East, and in Central Asia and Africa.

The same discomfort exists in U.S. relations with Pakistan, whose military government has not fully agreed to Washington's demands for military bases and cooperation against a Taliban regime that the Pakistani intelligence services themselves installed in power in Afghanistan.

The source of radical Islam today is Saudi Arabia. So long as Saudi oil riches subsidize Wahhabi influence and expansion, fundamentalism will have a firm financial and political base. Saudi Arabia is, at the same time, under attack from the radical and violent movement mobilized by the children of the Saudi elite—such as bin Laden. He is joined by recruits from an alienated (and often well-educated) generation of young Muslim elsewhere, declared enemies both of the United States and of their own allegedly corrupted national leaders.

When one writes about the internal complexities in the war against terrorism, and the nature and origins of the terrorist movement, some readers say this amounts to giving aid and comfort to the enemy by offering an explanation for what they do. They are thereby humanized. These readers seem not to want Islamic fundamentalist terrorism placed against a historical and cultural background, presumably because this constitutes an obstacle to seeing the enemy as simply a manifestation of evil. A critic in Chicago asked, "Are you trying to rationalize the murder of six thousand innocent civilians?" There is a difference in the language between "explain" and "rationalize," which I would have thought my readers understood.

There has also been an angry reaction to my argument that Americans must accept the consequences of U.S. policies that contributed to bringing us to this crisis. Nations, like individuals, pay a price for what they have, or have not, done in the past. The terrorists are taking revenge, in their minds, for harm done to them and their society by the United States.

In the case of a puritanical and literally reactionary movement, such as the Wahhabis, the influence of the modern secular world is itself harmful. The role of the United States as a modernizing force in global society is, in this worldview, criminal in itself. American critics of U.S. Middle Eastern policy often say that Washington is hated because it has supported dictatorial governments. These Middle Eastern critics hate the United States for the opposite reason: because it brings secular and liberal democratic ideas into the region.

America's support for Israel is not a primary issue for the bin Laden movement (even though American critics make much of it). It is a very important factor in opinion elsewhere in the Middle East, with particularly damaging effect among prodemocratic groups. The fundamentalists are concerned with the condition of Islamic society itself—its integrity, its purity, its future. This is why their fanaticism is deaf both to America's threats, and to reason. □

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Daniel Murtaugh

OUR TOWN

Terrorism with a library card

Delray Beach, Florida, is a town with a population of about fifty-five thousand in southern Palm Beach County, midway between Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. It hums pleasantly with a sense of civic purpose, having just been designated an "All-American City" for the second time in ten years. Its main street, Atlantic Avenue, runs straight to the ocean, and its eastern ten-or-so blocks have become a flourishing downtown, a model for surrounding communities that have come to realize the value of an identifiable center. Gertrude Stein would not say of Delray Beach, as she might of some towns nearby, that "there is no there there."

The same spirit of purposeful optimism that revitalized East Atlantic Avenue seems now to have focused effectively on plans to do the same for West Atlantic, which stretches from Swinton Avenue to Interstate 95, through an African American neighborhood with deep historical roots. I have a stake in this as president of the board of our public library, which hopes to erect a new building at the eastern end of this corridor. It will replace a beloved but now seriously overtaxed structure east of Swinton. This older building recently became a footnote to the events of September 11 and a minor tourist attraction, with implications that are as yet unclear.

The reference librarian at the library, a tall, friendly woman who had moved here recently from Michigan, found herself briefly in the news and under the close attention of the FBI. As computers have established themselves in libraries across the country, people in her position have become self-educated techies, simply because they are the nearest ones to ask how to get online and access e-mail. When demand is high (and that is most of the time) they maintain sign-up lists and ration usage. This is what she was doing one evening in July when two young men confronted her—not belligerently but with an awkward silence that forced her to ask whether they wanted to sign up for one of the computers, all of which were in use.

They did so, with a name not their own but not made up either, as it turned out. She recognized their conversation with one another as Arabic because she had once lived near the largest concentration of Arabic speakers in the United States, in Dearborn, Michigan. When they were both seated at one computer she remarked to a coworker that she had not heard Arabic since arriving in Delray Beach. Whenever

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she looked over at them, one of them looked steadily back at her, apparently concerned that she might be suspicious of what they were doing. But his gaze was not nervous or furtive but controlling, establishing a zone that she was not to enter.

Within an hour or so a third man, apparently older, joined them, spoke to them in Arabic and then approached her desk and sat down at a table that faced her directly. He had no books or magazines or papers to read. With incongruous equanimity he sat there, often looking at her, and effectively setting up a wider perimeter of control. Eventually he asked her if she could recommend a restaurant. She said that she could not, being new to the area, but several library patrons chimed in with their recommendations. Soon after, the three men left.

When names of suspects appeared in the news in the days after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, she was stunned to recognize the name that she had placed on the waiting list in July. It was Mohand Alsheri, a hijacker on the plane that struck the World Trade Center's south tower. She notified the director of the library and then the Delray Beach police. When the FBI appeared with pictures, she recognized three faces, but not that of Mohand Alsheri, whose name they had used. Two of those she knew were Waleed M. Alshehri and Wail M. Alshehri, who were on the plane that struck the north tower. The third, who looked and may have acted older but who seems to have been the same age as the other two, was Marwan Al-Shehhi, a hijacker of the plane that struck the south tower. The FBI took away two computers for examination, returning them only the other day and, naturally, said nothing about what, if anything, they had found in them.

When Marwan Al-Shehhi returned home that night in July, he went to a gated community with a row of trees on its eastern border that interrupts the sunset in our backyard. Like the local pharmacist who did his best to supply a remedy for Mohamed Atta's red, sore hands despite Atta's evasiveness about how they got that way, like the local doctor who prescribed Zantac for another terrorist's nervous stomach, not knowing that his other job as a Palm Beach County deputy sheriff was more urgently relevant, we did not have a clue. A friend in that gated community with a special interest in his neighbor's occupation also shared our obliviousness. He is a retired commander in the New York City Police Department who gained an international reputation as an expert on terrorism. In the mid-1970s, he told a conference in Paris that one of the two or three likeliest targets of a terrorist attack in the U.S. was the World Trade Center. He reports that his community is now on high alert, organizing watchful committees, and very unlikely to accept another applicant for a rental apartment who lists his occupation as "Wanderer." □

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DEATH & LIES IN EL SALVADOR

The ambassador's tale

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

By the time Ambassador Robert White was posted to El Salvador in 1980, he knew full well that politics could be a deadly affair. At age seventeen, he had joined the World War II Navy, and then served in the Pacific. As ambassador to Paraguay in the late 1970s and, earlier, as a Foreign Service officer in several of Latin America's similarly unsavory dictatorships, he had confronted human-rights abuses, violence, even murder. In El Salvador itself, more than nine thousand people were killed in the year he arrived. But after December 4, when he witnessed the disinterment of four American women murdered by Salvadoran soldiers, his life would never be the same.

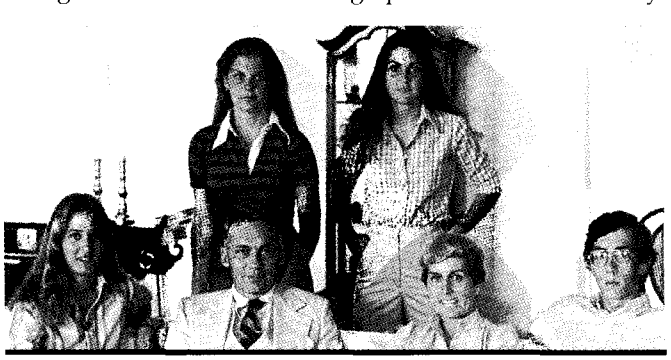
Two of the women, Jean Donovan and Sister Dorothy Kazel, had spent the night of December 1 as the guests of MaryAnn and Robert White at the embassy. White didn't necessarily agree with the criticism of U.S. policy that he heard that evening from Jean Donovan, but he was not going to stand by and let Salvador's brutal death squads and their American apologists get away with this atrocity. The experience of December 4 would lead him on an unexpected journey from successful American diplomat to candid critic of U.S. foreign policy.

That journey continues. Last October, White testified in federal court in West Palm Beach, Florida, about conditions in El Salvador during his time as ambassador. His testimony was part of the evidence brought against General Carlos Vides Casanova and General José Guillermo García, Salvadoran military officers now retired and living in Florida. Under the Torture Victim Protection Act, the two were charged in an unsuccessful civil suit with command responsibility for the abduction, rape, and murder of the four American churchwomen. The plaintiffs were the families of the victims, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan. Photos taken two days after the killings show White, fists clenched at his side, turning from the shallow grave; he is quoted in news accounts saying, "This time the bastards won't get away with it....The bastards won't get away with it."

But, they—the colonels, the military, the police, and the oligarchy of El Salvador—did get away with it. Although six National Guardsmen were convicted of the murders in 1984, no one believes they acted independently. García and Vides Casanova, who had tolerated and encouraged those abuses, retained power in El Salvador with the blessings and financial support of the U.S. government and are still fending off lawsuits in the United States. By contrast, Ambassador White, who had flagged the abuses of the military and refused to acquiesce in U.S. military intervention, was forced from the State Department in 1981.

Sitting in his Washington office at the Center for International Policy (CIP) in the spring of 2001, White summons that past, those people and events, with virtually instantaneous recall. A memory for names, faces, conversations, and policy details is among the prized attributes of the effective diplomat. At age seventy-five, White skillfully deploys that asset in recalling the past as well as offering a quick analysis of current U.S. policy in Colombia and Cuba. His light blue eyes are hooded as he remembers the ins and outs of his diplomatic posts in Nicaragua and at the Organization of American States, in Paraguay and El Salvador, and runins with Washington powerhouses Jesse Helms and Henry Kissinger. Those eyes open in a steady gaze as he delivers a pithy conclusion or a brief story: "When I was a young officer flying to Latin America, I sat next to Juan de Onis, the *New York Times* reporter. He asked me who I was and where I was going. I told him I was in the Foreign Service on my way to a new post. He looked at me and said, everyone knows they send the dregs of the department down there. And I said I hear the same thing about the *New York Times*. We became fast friends."

The former ambassador has described his twenty-five-year Foreign Service career as "failing upwards." "I was fired by



The Whites in Paraguay, late 1970s.

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels *is the editor of* Commonweal. *The research and writing of this article were funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.*

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the Nixon White House for opposing politicization of the Peace Corps, reprimanded by Henry Kissinger for speaking out on human rights, and finally, definitely dismissed by Alexander Haig for opposing a military solution in El Salvador." A nice conceit, but like many Irish-American Catholics after World War II, White's whole life could be said to have "failed upwards." He was born September 21, 1926, and grew up, the oldest of five, in Melrose, a working-class town near Boston. Melrose was overwhelmingly Protestant, which, White quips, kept you Catholic. He also recalls in lively detail a strong mother, a tight-knit family, a good parish with able priests, and a friend, David Rice, who shared a love of reading and a penchant for debating the truths of Catholicism. Sociologists often refer to White's generation as pre-Vatican II Catholics. He is certainly among those who embraced the changes the council brought to the church and its stance toward the world in the 1960s. Nonetheless, he seems to retain all of the instincts of a sturdy pre-conciliar faith.

After his youthful stint as a radioman in the Pacific in World War II, White returned home to Melrose to help support his family. The GI Bill, the ticket of many Catholic veterans to higher education, sent him to Saint Michael's in Winooski, Vermont, in 1948. Despite what he describes as a "spotty high-school record," he threw himself into the study of history, from the Greeks and Romans to the twentieth century. After graduation in 1952, he studied in England on a Fulbright, returning a year later to attend the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts. "When I was in college many of us were under the delusion that most of the domestic problems of the United States were well on their way to solution. The real challenge was international." A certain "quotient of idealism" led him to apply to the Foreign Service. "I wanted to contribute to making things better. It was one of the few professions where you could do work that was intrinsically interesting—and get paid for it. You didn't have to live in penury the way you did at universities. And finally, I was more of an activist than a scholar." In 1955, he was appointed a Foreign Service officer and wed MaryAnn Cahill, a field director for the Girl Scouts, who had promised to marry him when he got a real job.

Nothing but dictatorships

Major cold-war tensions—the war in Korea (1950–53), the Cuban missile crisis (1961), and the Berlin Wall (1961)—dominated U.S. foreign policy as White began his career. He could be described as a cold-war liberal given a reality check in Latin America. "Not to recognize that Russia, the Soviet Union, was a threat to the United States seemed to me to be nourishing illusions," he says. "There was a need to take a stand against communism. There was a need for the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which were enlightened and adequate responses to the challenge. The problem came—and here I have to go into Latin America—in the developing world where we fought proxy wars that really did not need to be fought."

After serving in Hong Kong and Ottawa, in 1963 the Whites and their five children (ages five months to seven years) were posted to Ecuador. The Southern Hemisphere did not normally attract ambitious young Foreign Service officers. But Castro's effort to export the Cuban revolution was a challenge to what White describes as the "colonial office atmosphere" of the U.S. Foreign Service in Latin America. The Kennedy White House hoped to change all of that by a combination of cold-war strategies and social reform. To that end, the Alliance for Progress was organized in 1961 under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS) to bring social and economic change. It proved to be an effective recruiting device for younger career officers who normally would have preferred cold-war hot spots in Europe and Asia. White, eager to put his "quotient of idealism" to work, saw the Alliance as "a framework on the side of progress toward democracy." In retrospect, he concedes that the Alliance "may have been the product of wishful thinking, in effect, asking the elites of Latin America to preside over their own destruction." In any case, U.S. funding for the Alliance gradually evaporated as the war in Vietnam escalated through the 1960s, finally leaving only military aid for counterinsurgency programs.

White saw this process at work in the late sixties and seventies in Honduras (1965–68), Nicaragua (1970–72), and Colombia (1972–75) where, he observes, he "served in practically nothing but dictatorships." The cold-war impulse to support a "primitive anticommunism" made the United States "anti-union, anti-free expression," often opposing local reform efforts inspired by American values. Policies, such as refusing U.S. visas, "made perfectly decent men and women pariahs in their own countries," marking them as unacceptable to the U.S. government. White, along with many of his Foreign Service colleagues, "kept sending back reports advocating less identification with military dictators and more encouragement of democratic forces, who were not necessarily enemies of the United States, but actually drew their inspiration from our leaders and from our institutions. But we lost most of the time."

In Nicaragua and Honduras, White watched with sympathy the development of "third-way" projects, usually Jesuit-sponsored workshops promoting Christian Democratic unions and political parties on a European model. MaryAnn White remembers that one of the first things her husband did in a new country was to make contact with the political opposition by attending their meetings, teaching at the local university, and playing tennis with them. "He pursued any avenue that would provide a dialogue with the opposition. You already knew where the government was." From 1963 to 1976, White did what the best Foreign Service officers do: built relationships with local leaders, observed the intellectual and political tendencies of opposition figures, reported his findings regularly to the State Department. At two points he stepped out of the normal Foreign Service career track, first to serve as Peace Corps director for Latin America (1968–70) and later as U.S. deputy chief of mission at the OAS (1975–77).

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The Carter interregnum

U.S. policy shifted with Jimmy Carter's election in 1976. The Carter administration's emphasis on human rights and its embrace of détente gave White and like-minded Foreign Service officers a framework that loosened the straitjacket of anti-Communist policy—but inevitably created tensions both with Latin American countries and in Washington itself. When White was given his first ambassadorial post in Paraguay in 1977, he had an opportunity to probe how committed Washington was to the new human-rights policy in concrete circumstances. "Everybody hated [President Alfredo] Stroessner," he recalls. "When [Secretary of State] Cyrus Vance or [his deputy] Warren Christopher went to the Hill, one of the human-rights-friendly senators or congressmen would ask, 'Can you point to a single place where the human-rights policy has made a difference?' They would all say, 'Paraguay.'" And indeed, that policy in White's hands unsettled the regime: he saved the lives of several political activists, helped to preserve a precarious labor movement by diplomatic interventions, and exposed the fact that the Nazi war criminal, Joseph Mengele, held Paraguayan citizenship.

White's performance in Paraguay earned him the approval of the State Department and the ire of Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). In the fall of 1979, White was named ambassador to El Salvador, which on October 15 had installed a five-man junta headed by a progressive young military officer, Colonel Adolfo Majano. Over the course of the next year, the civilian composition of the junta would go from a coalition of center-left representatives including a businessman and a social democrat to a coalition of center-right representatives with Christian Democrat Napoleón Duarte, made president in December 1980. Despite this shift in composition, the Carter administration believed that the coalition had to be supported. White's aggressive and very public promotion of human rights and democracy in Paraguay made him the ideal candidate to help foster a moderate democratic regime in El Salvador and forestall a takeover from the left like that of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in July 1979.

Salvadoran politics, 1980: part of the picture.

But Senator Helms did not want an activist human-rights ambassador in El Salvador and held up White's confirmation for four months. Finally, on February 21, 1980, the Foreign Relations Committee on a vote of 10–2 sent the nomination to the Senate floor. Helms likened White's confirmation to "a torch tossed in a pool of oil."

Congressional differences were mirrored in the Carter administration itself. Before leaving for El Salvador, White attended a National Security Council meeting. There, introduced by Secretary Vance, he was given advice by various cabinet officers. "As we were leaving, [National Security Adviser] Zbigniew Brzezinski said, 'Do you want troops down there?' 'No,' I said, 'I think really that's the last thing I want. I view this as a [situation] that can be solved by political means.' And he kind of just shook his head. There was this perpetual conflict between Vance and Brzezinski on everything," including the priorities the United States should have in Latin America: democratic reform or support of military regimes in the name of anticommunism. So persistent were these differences that by the end of the Carter administration, the foreign-policy apparatus was derisively referred to by friend and foe alike as the fudge factory.

The crosscurrents and tensions in Washington were more than matched by those White encountered in El Salvador. Throughout his tenure, the ambassador had to resist Pentagon pressure, especially from the Southern Command in Panama, to send military advisors. Though White fired the CIA station chief on arriving in El Salvador, he felt he was always having to circumvent the agency's ubiquitous meddling. A number of Salvadoran military and political leaders were on its payroll. "Duarte was on the CIA payroll," White points out. And so was Nicholas Caranzza, head of the Treasury police; "I was truly offended at that—Caranzza had the worst record on human rights." White considers that the "CIA had its own agenda and it was not necessarily the agenda of U.S. policy." Even today, two decades later, the CIA's activities in that time and place remain obscure; unlike the State Department, the agency has not responded to Freedom of Information requests for documents.

The critical year

Nineteen eighty was a pivotal year for El Salvador. Would the tiny nation of 5 million people revert to military rule by the extreme right, which had kept it one of the most oppressive and inequitable societies in Latin America? Would it fall to a left-wing guerrilla movement as Nicaragua did in July 1979? Or could it, as the Carter administration hoped, evolve through this junta in a moderate and democratic direction? When White arrived early in March, his assignment was to encourage the growth of a political center and to discourage the flagrant human-rights abuses of the military and the death squads (usually the military in civilian dress), which were driving moderates and leftists into political alliances with the guerrillas. This was the assessment he made in a report that month to Washington: "If the systematic vi-

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olation of human rights in the countryside does not cease, all the agrarian and banking reforms in the world will not help. Sometime over the course of the next six months, the civilian members of the junta and Colonel Majano will have to insist on the ouster of those in the army and security forces who permit and encourage torturing and killing innocent civilians in a brutal effort to end political action. The extreme right will keep on trying to convince the conservative officers to return to their natural alliance with the rich."

Fostering that center meant that White talked with everyone who would talk: members of the FDR (Revolutionary Democratic Front), Majano, the Christian Democrats, then-Colonel García (the defense minister), the Jesuits at the UCA (University of Central America)—all had a willing conversation partner. But in El Salvador the extremes were extreme indeed. "You had Cayetano Carpio of the FPL (Popular Liberation Forces), a total fanatic," whom White compared to Cambodia's "Pol Pot left." "Then you had the extreme right represented by the [Robert] D'Aubuisson crew, who would just kill anybody"—and did. White once referred to him as a "psychopathic killer."

U.S. policy had always opposed the left; in White's tenure the right was criticized as well. In fact, to his mind the right-wing oligarchs constituted the greatest obstacle to the emergence of a centrist government and its effective control of the police and military—an assessment White offered frequently, loudly, and publicly, especially to conservative gatherings. This made life difficult and dangerous, even in the upscale neighborhood of the ambassador's residence. On arriving at her new home, MaryAnn White recalls opening the door to the garden and being shoved back against the wall by a security man who warned her, "Your neighbors would like to kill you."

In March, at a welcoming party given by the local American association, Mrs. White, listening from the sidelines, heard the man next to her say of her husband, "If I had a gun, I'd kill him." And "it wasn't just the Salvadorans," she recalls. "There were a lot of the [American] business community associated with the Salvadoran military and oligarchy who were very unhappy at this kind of an ambassador."

Death threats and demonstrations followed. The embassy and the ambassador's residence came under siege by right and left alike. In April, MaryAnn White's embassy office (she was evacuation coordinator) was shelled twice by a guerrilla faction with Chinese rockets. In mid-May, White and his deputy, Mark Dion, were besieged for two days by rightists sympathetic to Major D'Aubuisson, who was temporarily jailed for conspiring to overthrow the government. The ambassador recalls with some amusement that Mrs. D'Aubuisson in protest parked her Mercedes across the exit of the driveway. The two diplomats finally broke out in an armored Cadillac amid a contingent of Marines and a cloud of tear gas.

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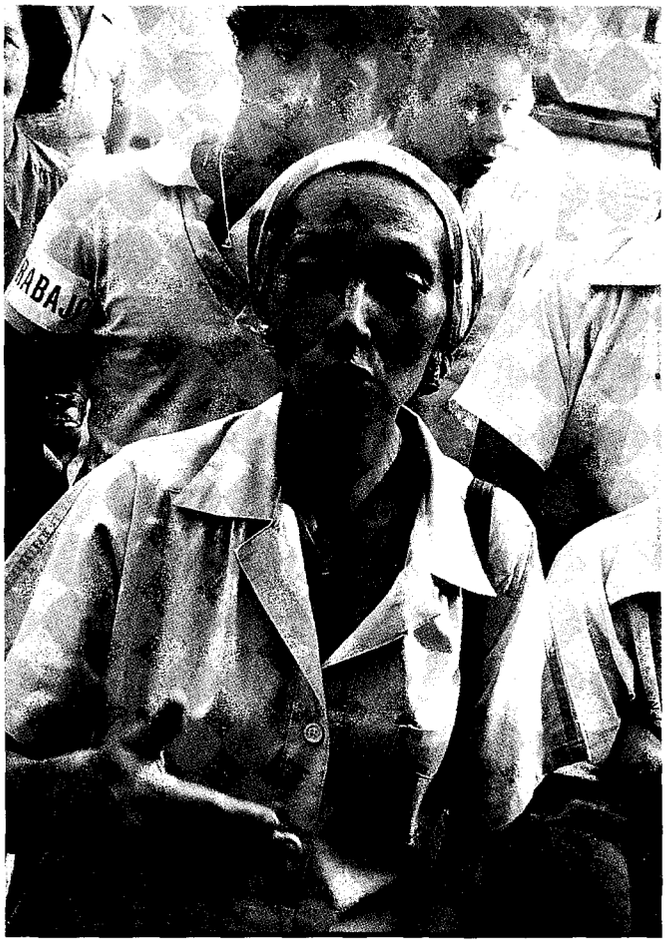

Mrs. D'Aubuisson protests.

Even though military dictator General Carlos Romero was gone, Salvadorans continued to live in a state of terror. Those who could left the country; those who remained lived under the threat of torture and violent death. In February 1980, D'Aubuisson accused Mario Zamora, the solicitor general, of links to a guerrilla group; a few days later Zamora was seized at home by a death squad and shot a dozen times in the face. Some nine thousand other Salvadorans—peasants, union organizers, political leaders, anyone considered a subversive by men like D'Aubuisson—were murdered in the course of 1980.

That summer, Sally Guttmacher, now professor of health studies at New York University, led a group of U.S. public-health workers to El Salvador to investigate charges that Salvadoran doctors and nurses were killed for treating the wounded, and that the military entered hospitals, seizing patients along with doctors and nurses. The allegations, which turned out to be true, were a violation of the Geneva Conventions. On their arrival, Ambassador White immediately invited the group to the embassy, which Guttmacher remembers looked like a fortress, its interior "a maze of halls and locked doors like a prison." White offered the group assistance, and "he wanted to know where we were going and whom we were meeting with." Guttmacher was suspicious. Today she speculates that she mistook White's concern for their safety (the U.S. State Department had issued an advisory against travel to El Salvador), and feared that names on their itinerary would fall into the hands of Salvadoran intelligence.

Guttmacher's suspicions of White proved unfounded, but they were not, given the state of the country, implausible. Journalist Anne Nelson (now director of international programs at the Columbia School of Journalism), who covered El Salvador in 1980 and intermittently through the decade, remembers the bodies on the streets, the nights full of gunfire, and journalists working under death threats. She also recalls how "hard it was to figure things out. Who was telling the truth? Who was lying?" Nelson declares in retrospect, "White had an impossible job."

Amid the fear and paranoia, the chaos and the killings, White worked to sustain the ever-shifting political center. News accounts of White's modus operandi portray a man who spoke forthrightly and on the record to journalists about the political situation and who pressed the U.S. case, with unflagging energy, to the military, the oligarchy, the politicians, and the guerrillas. He was both aggressive and courageous, refusing to isolate himself in the embassy; nor would he be deterred by the violence and subterfuge around him. In February, the junta had agreed to land-reform measures and a change in banking practices; two right-wing coup efforts were turned back, and opposition party leaders (FDR) continued to talk.

But White's other goal, stemming the human-rights abuses, proved elusive. The junta's efforts to curb abuses by the military were met with denial by Defense Minister García. He would concede only that rogue elements in the National Guard might be responsible for some deaths, but insisted against all logic that it was the guerrillas who were killing peasants and workers. This intransigence led over several months to the resignations of the junta's moderate civilians. At the same time, García gradually transferred progressive officers from San Salvador, the capital, to rural posts, and sometimes abroad. Finally on December 7, 1980, Colonel Alfredo Majano, the head of the junta, was forced out and replaced by Napoleón Duarte, an ambiguous figure who had been fairly elected president in 1972 but robbed of his victory by the military. Now, as it turned out, he was on the payroll of the CIA. The military and the oligarchy refused to accept that a resolution of El Salvador's problems lay in political and economic reforms and not in gunning down every critic of the status quo. Because CIA records from this period remain classified, there are many unanswered questions about how much this intransigence was sustained, and even legitimated, by the CIA's involvement with the Salvadoran police and military. If the CIA did not object to these practices, why should García and other military leaders take the ambassador's admonitions seriously?

White in action

At Sunday Mass, March 16, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero read from a letter he had written to President Carter urging

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him to end all military aid to El Salvador. Sitting in the congregation, White felt that Romero was addressing him directly. The following Sunday, March 23, the archbishop called in his sermon for Salvadoran soldiers to lay down their arms, "Thou shalt not kill! No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God." In White's view the sermon struck "at the heart of the Salvadoran social order where the military, in effect, garrisons an unjust society, and takes out either through intimidation or death anybody who is a serious dissenter." Much as White shared Romero's analysis, he was uneasy at the archbishop's call: "It seemed to me unlikely that it would have much positive effect and that it had a huge capacity for a negative effect." The next day Archbishop Romero was shot through the heart while saying Mass.

The oligarchy and the military (D'Aubuisson again the lead man) had eliminated a forceful proponent of reform in El Salvador. Shortly after arriving in early March, White had paid Romero a visit. The ambassador arrived in an armored limousine accompanied by an advance car and a chase car. "After we had talked for half an hour, the archbishop said, 'Well, ambassador, why don't you just come ride with me.' He's got this Volkswagen. He said, 'God will protect us.' I asked, 'What if he is only protecting you?'"

"So, we joked about that," recalls White, but he had a serious purpose in visiting Romero. "My message was, 'We should work together.'" Was that possible or even likely? The $5.7 million "nonlethal" military aid package (communication and transportation equipment) that White considered his leverage with the military was the subject of strenuous objections not only by Romero but also by the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) and others who favored Carter's human-rights policy but opposed support for the Salvadoran military. The leverage argument didn't convince them; rather, the aid appeared to be an endorsement of the military and death-squad violence.

Other Americans were also at Archbishop Romero's Mass on March 23. Tom Quigley of the USCC remembers Romero processing up the aisle, "a little bit like Christ entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday." He also remembers White going to Communion surrounded by bodyguards. In a memorial Quigley wrote for *The Witness* (September 1980), he compared Romero's death to the Passion and death of Jesus, "He is stirring up the people; he has blasphemed against the idols of the state; it is better that one man die; what need have we of further witnesses?" He drew White into his gospel metaphor, "Caesar, too, strutted upon this stage, unwitting and unwilling, perhaps, but present nonetheless. If you let this man go, thou art no friend of the United States." Quigley now distances himself from the comparison: "I made some criticisms that I would take out [of the article] today. I think I got off into a little flight of fancy." Still, his flight of fancy captures the powerful crosscurrents that beset U.S. policy in El Salvador among Catholics as among U.S. policymakers.

The Catholic Church in El Salvador, as in virtually every Latin American country, had traditionally been the ally of the rich and powerful. Now it was a church divided between that alliance and the call of the gospel as put forth by the Latin American bishops at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, by liberation theologians, and by foreign missionaries. These contending views had consequences for everyone, including American missionaries.

On the morning of December 3, 1980, when U.S. Consul Patricia Lasbury in San Salvador phoned Chief of Police Lopez Nuila to report three nuns and a layworker missing, she was asked whether the nuns were in habits. Garcia asked White the same question later in the day. In the Salvadoran military lexicon "good" nuns wore habits, "bad" nuns did not. The women did not wear religious habits. Working with the poor, no less than the dress code, marked them as troublemakers. The military and the oligarchs had "a whole idea of the church as pie in the sky," as essentially concerned with the world to come, observes White. "But now when the missionaries and clergy were turning the people on to their rights as human beings, that was something quite difficult for them to cope with."

White watched these and other tensions develop in his several posts, not simply as a Foreign Service officer, but as a Catholic able to read the ins and outs of church politics and to find in the clergy a rich source of information and insight. "The priests and the bishops of the church in Latin America were almost always very, very well informed. They may have a particular view, but talking to them I found out what was going on. The papal nuncios usually had a very different viewpoint than the local bishops. The nuncios lived in a world where any kind of social conflict disturbed what they see as that tripartite order of the rich, the military, and the church working together."

White believed "that the progressive church had a very important role to play in stabilizing El Salvador, moving it toward a reform that would blunt revolution." Yet even among progressives, White saw contrasting, and sometimes contradictory, tendencies. There were contending versions of liberation theology. "I knew Gustavo Gutiérez [of Peru], who was an impressive man." He also knew Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., the rector of the UCA "who I thought had gone too far into a Marxist definition of things. I thought [Cardinal Joseph] Ratzinger had a point when he said that the poor of the Gospels do not equate to the masses of Marx." Though the Nicaraguan Jesuits were instrumental in the Sandinista revolution, that didn't worry White, "as long as they were people committed to Nicaragua." Other clergy he found more challenging and troubling. "Some of the priests were Basques or Catalans, revolutionaries from birth. This combined with an intellectual anti-Americanism and a very progressive liberation theology—boy, that was a tough mix." Some Americans priests "were sort of knocked out" by that combination, though most "weren't intellectually up" for the kind of analysis it required. In contrast, White often found reforming local priests "less radical because they were far

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more deeply immured in the reality of their country."

Such views reflected White's commitment to a middle way, a centrist, democratic El Salvador. White did not understand himself to be, in Quigley's metaphor, "a Caesar strutting on the stage." If, unlike Romero, White did not want military aid cut, that was because he considered it his chief diplomatic tool in the struggle to support the moderates and curb the military. But was democracy really possible in a country that had a long history of political violence and limited judicial procedures, and almost no history of democratic practices? White's predecessor as ambassador did not think it could be done—and fearing for his life, asked to be relieved of his post. In favoring democratic reform but refusing, even more strongly, to countenance another left-wing government in Central America, wasn't U.S. policy, in effect, ultimately supporting a brutal status quo? A Sandinista-like government was a future that some Catholics saw as the solution to the grinding poverty and inequities of El Salvador. For example, White listened to Jean Donovan, the night before she was murdered, argue that "there were some real reasons for revolution."

The end of the road

MaryAnn and Bob White had met Dorothy Kazel and Donovan at an American Thanksgiving service in San Salvador on November 20. They invited the two to dinner on December 1 and to stay the night. Kazel, an Ursuline sister, and Donovan, a laywoman, were picking up a group of Maryknollers, including Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, the next day. They came with two other American missionaries, Father Paul Schneider and Sister Christine Rhody. Members of the embassy staff joined them and the Whites for dinner. Mrs. White remembers a lively and friendly evening. "Jean was ebullient and had a great sense of humor, very sure of what she was doing. She challenged Bob directly, 'How can you be working for these schmucks with this policy?' And he replied, 'Look, you have to be practical. If you want to work things out you have to talk about it. You can't be angry at them. You can't be insulting.' He tried to explain to her his view of the situation. She wasn't buying it."

The ambassador saw their differences lying largely in their distinctive roles and purposes. The nuns were in El Salvador "because they had a vocation," he now explains. "They were totally committed to helping poor people. They drew some correct and understandable conclusions about the need for change from their experience working with the poor and with refugees. Were they great political analysts? No. I think they were drawing on their experience." In contrast, White considered himself to be in El Salvador pursuing an ambiguous and difficult political strategy that involved working with a government compromised by its ties to the military.

The fault line in White's own role became clear in the events that quickly followed that friendly dinner. The next morning, Tuesday, December 2, Defense Minister García came to have one of his regular breakfasts with the ambassador. Meanwhile, Mrs. White had breakfast upstairs with Kazel and Donovan, their overnight guests. And then, she recalls with a sad nod of her head, "I saw them off at about eleven o'clock."

By the following morning (Wednesday), Kazel and Donovan, along with Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, were dead and hastily and secretly buried. On Thursday (December 4), their bodies were discovered and Robert White, despite his counsel to Donovan, was an angry man.

When Ambassador White returned home that day, MaryAnn White remembers him being "very quiet and terribly upset. That evening I asked, 'Can you talk about this?' He said, 'No, I cannot.' And, you know, he has never talked about it to me. That was a searing memory. That may actually have been the memory that changed him." In the final calculus, she believes that the deaths "just made him determined that this was not going to happen again." The death of the four churchwomen opened the final chapter of Robert White's tenure in El Salvador, and as it turned out, in the Foreign Service as well.

The election of Ronald Reagan a month earlier, on November 4, 1980, brought a dramatic shift in events. U.S. policy in El Salvador became a contested arena between the outgoing Carter administration and the incoming Reagan one. Reagan's election was greeted with noisy enthusiasm among Salvador's oligarchs; parties and gun bursts celebrated the man who would save them not only from revolution but from reform and from Robert White as well. Reagan's conservative allies and appointees conjured up the threat of Soviet subversion with El Salvador and Nicaragua on the front lines. Visits from members of the Reagan transition team to El Salvador gave the elite and the military reason to understand that concern for human rights was being downgraded in favor of wiping out the Communists. (As soon as Secretary of State Alexander Haig took office at the end of January 1981, he announced, "international terrorism will take the place of human rights," as the priority of U.S. foreign policy.) The first week in December, shortly after the four churchwoman had been killed, a Reagan transition team critique of Carter's policy and a "hit list" of U.S. envoys to be removed from their posts, including White in El Salvador and Lawrence Pezzullo in Nicaragua, was leaked to the press. On December 11, Patricia Derian, Carter's assistant secretary of state for human rights, said that comments by the Reagan transition team had contributed to the murders of the women. On December 13, Senator Helms demanded White's resignation, calling him "one of the most irresponsible and inept ambassadors that the United States has ever sent abroad." White and Pezzullo entered vigorous protests against this effort to undermine their positions and U.S. policy while Carter remained in office.

Meanwhile, as if on cue, the Salvadoran right had delivered a series of blows designed to cripple the human-rights policy and to force a return to the familiar anti-Communist

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script. On November 27, six leaders of the moderate-left FDR were seized at a meeting in a Jesuit high school. Their mutilated bodies were found the next day. The four churchwomen were raped and murdered on December 2. On January 4, the head of Salvador's land-reform program and two American colleagues, with links to the American labor movement and the CIA, were gunned down. In six weeks, the Salvadoran military had wiped out center-left politics, crippled the land-reform program, and given notice that American missionaries and reformers (even those with CIA connections) were not exempt from the tribunal of the death squads.

Reagan's election was greeted with noisy enthusiasm among Salvador's oligarchs; parties and gun bursts celebrated the man who would save them not only from revolution but from reform and from Robert White as well.

The Carter administration and its policy of leveraging human rights with military aid was also unraveling. On December 5, President Carter cut off economic and military aid to protest the American churchwomen's deaths—only to restore it on January 13. Then, just days before leaving office, Carter approved, over White's objections, $5 million in lethal military aid, including automatic rifles and combat helicopters. This new aid, the president said, was based on State Department assurances that progress was being made in investigating the deaths of the four churchwomen. But the price for the metamorphosis of the Carter policy into the Reagan policy was more than millions of dollars. It required systematic misrepresentation to the U.S. Congress and the American public by the Reagan administration concerning the atrocities of the Salvadoran military, which the U.S. now began to underwrite with increasing amounts of military aid.

White would have none of it: shortly after Reagan's election, he refused to sign a request for lethal military aid, ostensibly from him but in reality from the Army's Southern Command in Panama. He also objected adamantly to the State Department's claim that progress was being made in the investigation of the deaths of the four churchwomen. "As far as I am concerned," he told Juan de Onis of the *New York Times* (January 22, 1982) "there is no reason to believe that the government of El Salvador is conducting a serious investigation." Subsequent revelations and declassified State Department documents show not only that there was no serious investigation but that a cover-up by the Salvadoran military had been under way from the beginning.

After Reagan's inauguration, Alexander Haig recalled White to Washington. Twenty years later, White still believes that "had we had a united policy in Washington to achieve a peaceful solution to El Salvador's problems in 1980–81, it could have been done. It was a tough problem, but not insoluble." And so he tried to convince Haig. "But the Reagan conservatives wanted to demonstrate an ability to crush revolutions. They wanted to say in El Salvador, this is what we could have done in Vietnam, had we not been saddled by reporters, by columnists—all those liberals. I tried to tell Haig, you're not going to do it, not with the tools available to you, not with the forces available to you." Haig was not interested in White's analysis. He congratulated the ambassador on doing a fine job in El Salvador and summarily and unceremoniously removed him from his post.

To be yanked like that, without a new assignment in hand, violated established Foreign Service procedures. For the time being, White continued as a Foreign Service officer in Washington, sharing a basement office with outgoing Secretary of State Edmund Muskie. But he was not done with El Salvador. Congressional critics of the new Reagan policy wanted White's assessment on the public record. He was subpoenaed and appeared on February 25 before the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations. He testified that the Salvadoran security forces were the country's chief killers; that, despite the guerrillas' call to arms in January '81, there was little chance of a revolutionary takeover; and finally, that the Reagan administration's request for $25 to $30 million in military aid would undermine rather than support the civilian government. The decision to testify could not have been easy for White, who saw himself as an insider.

Even today White still argues what he implicitly said to Jean Donovan: "Historically, the only way things have ever gotten done in [U.S.] foreign policy was from the inside, working for change." Working inside, of course, meant "that the respect that really matters is the respect of your colleagues." White believes that he held that respect until he became an active critic of Reagan's policy in El Salvador. "I felt compelled for ethical reasons to dissent from the policy as it developed. That's not something that's really accepted in the Foreign Service. You can do a lot of terrible things. You can go to work as a lobbyist for the country that you were once accredited to, but you can't dissent." Five months after going public in his congressional testimony, White was "retired" from the Foreign Service.

Citizen diplomat

White's departure from the State Department did not, however, end his foreign-policy work; instead, it created a far broader portfolio. He joined the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he began to write and speak out against Reagan's policy in El Salvador and in Central America. A man who once confined his opinions to cables and diplomatic pouches soon became the master of the op-ed

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piece and the dissenting public speech. His ability to stay on message shows up in transcripts of radio and TV broadcasts. And despite his far-reaching criticisms, he retains a conviction that the United States has a positive role to play in the world. From a cold-war liberal he has become a liberal internationalist with an abiding commitment to diplomacy as a means of bringing change and a deep skepticism about military power as a tool of foreign policy. "If you've got a Pentagon that's overfunded, and you've got a CIA that's overfunded and the State Department is underfunded, and AID has practically no money, then you're going to get policies that emphasize the wrong things for a democracy to emphasize."

Since Alexander Haig dismissed him in 1981, White has exercised his considerable skills as a diplomat in policies affecting trouble spots around the world.

- South Korea: in 1985, White, with the knowledge of the State Department, led a delegation of prominent Americans that returned Kim Dae Jung, South Korea's current president and Nobel Prize winner, from exile in the United States. The group was confronted by Korean police who seized and placed Jung under house arrest.
- Paraguay: in 1986, White and a group of Americans attempted to return Domingo Laino, an opposition leader, to his country. The police clubbed members of the entourage, including Laino and White.
- Haiti: in 1987, White served as an election observer in Haiti's first free election in thirty years. The process was disrupted by violence and the election was postponed; in 1993, White served as an advisor to the democratically elected and exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the Governors Island Agreement that returned Aristide to Haiti.
- Afghanistan: in 1988, White and former ambassador to Tehran William Sullivan led the first delegation of Americans to the country since the Soviet invasion. President Mohammed Najibullah warned the Americans that the country could become another Iran, if the fundamentalist forces being armed by Washington came to power.
- Colombia: over the last several years, White and his colleagues at CIP have provided in briefings, articles, and their own newsletter a steady and critical analysis of U.S. policy in Colombia, including military aid and the wholesale use of pesticides to curb the drug trade.
- Cuba: over the last decade, White, with distinguished delegations of former diplomats and military officers, has visited the island in an effort to encourage a post-Castro transition to democracy and to urge the United States to ease economic sanctions.

As president of the Center for International Policy since 1990, White continues to try to influence U.S. foreign policy in the form of citizen diplomacy. More than that, he is a witness to the hubris of American power abroad when it forsakes the ideas and principles that contain it at home. That witness appears to be rooted in a sophisticated sense of patriotism and a religious and ethical understanding of the limits to what one may say or do for one's country.

It is no easy matter to extract from Robert White an extended reflection about his religious faith. Anything resembling "faith sharing" is not a mode that comes readily to a person deeply formed in the preconciliar church. The Whites belong to their local parish in Alexandria where, he pointedly notes, there is very little preaching on social justice. MaryAnn White, having retired from a Girl Scouts outreach project for the greater Washington area, works with Hispanic immigrants.

It is also no easy matter to extract from Robert White an explanation for his public dissent as ambassador and the end of his career in the Foreign Service. Diplomats are the consummate bureaucrats trained and sworn to carry out the foreign policy of their country, shaping their public speech and actions to those ends. The rules are clear: self-discipline, honest reporting in cables, discretion, silence, and acquiescence in policy made by elected leaders. White rejects any grand explanations for his last-ditch stands in favor of the Carter policy, even as Carter was abandoning it, or his refusal to accede to a Reagan administration cover-up in the deaths of the four churchwomen. In an interview published in the *Progressive* (September 1981) after his dismissal, White summed up his outlook, "Look, I am—or at least I was—a disciplined Foreign Service officer. I don't go out looking for windmills to joust. And the idea that I'm some sort of martyr—well, I'm not."

Yet, that very sense of himself as a disciplined Foreign Service officer may be what led to his dissent and going public. Add to that a Catholic sense of limits to dissembling and lying—even for one's country. He describes his transition from foreign-policy supporter to foreign-policy critic as an evolution and not a conversion. The deaths of the churchwomen figure in that evolution, but in White's view not as directly as others (even his wife) believe. "The deaths had a profound impact; they were a terrible thing." But, he adds, many people were killed and in horrible ways in El Salvador. The decisive step came, White insists, when "people asked me to lie about the facts. And that is where I drew the line."

Talking one way and acting another is, White argues, what ultimately undermines national security. "You have to tell the truth within institutions. Institutions cannot function on lies." During the Reagan administration, White says, there was "a consistent tissue of lies about El Salvador, about Nicaragua, about what we were doing in Honduras, and in Guatemala." There was, in his assessment, "no surer way of undermining U.S. policy than setting up this opposition between the free press and its version of what was happening and the actual policy," a policy shrouded in lies and secrecy that played itself out during the eighties in the duplicity of Oliver North, John Poindexter, and Elliott Abrams.

"The one thing that I felt," White says, "and I think it was due to my Catholic upbringing, was that you had to have some fidelity to truth, to fact, and that lying is destructive." □

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William O'Rourke

WHAT WE SAW

How September 11 looked on TV

I usually avoid the vice of early morning TV. I listen to the radio, which has become, by default, the generally preferred intellectual medium, providing more information per minute more densely, stripped as it is of the crutch of visual images. But, unfortunately, some visual images are the story.

On September 11, shortly after 8 A.M. in the Midwest, a sonorous male voice during NPR's "Morning Edition" said, rather hesitantly, "It's been reported a plane has struck the World Trade Center." I pictured many things at once, but I put down my razor and walked into the living room and turned on the television.

There it was, on the screen, Tower One burning like a cheap candle, smoke billowing upwards. It had been no small plane.

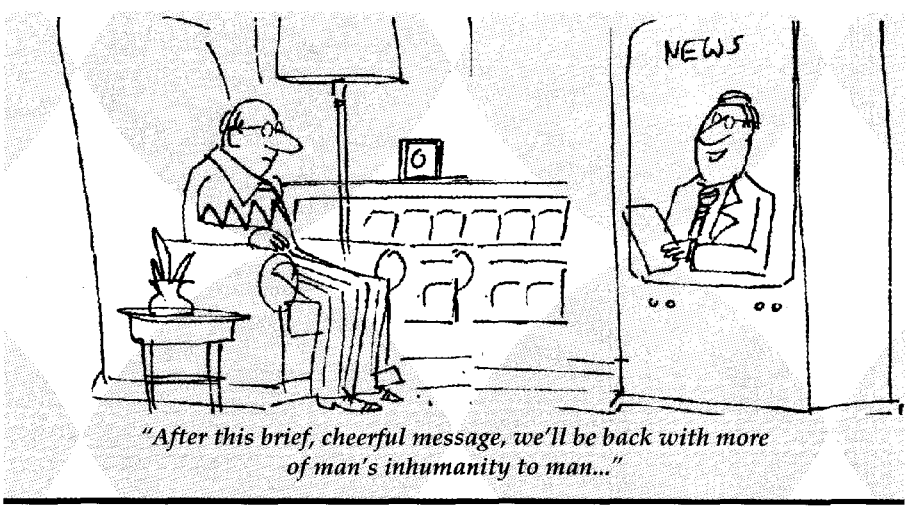
I stood watching and then saw a large jet curving toward the second tower and heard, not really hearing, since the sight was so stunning, a Fox News male voice say something like, "Here comes another one!"

It was now more than clear this was no accident. The tape of the second plane coming at the tower was run again and again. Both towers were now aflame and I said to myself that those towers would be coming down soon. It was unthinkable that the towers' structural supports wouldn't have been cut or damaged beyond their tolerances.

I presumed everyone would be evacuating them. Then it was reported that there was some sort of fire or explosion in Washington. There was no film of what had occurred, just the smoky aftermath. We saw uniformed personnel running across a bridge. That sight was galvanizing, because in their uniforms the event, at least, looked military.

Shortly thereafter, President George W. Bush was shown, obviously shaken, standing on a school's stage, the backdrop's childish decorations adding to the unease. He was in Florida, at one of his many visits to a primary school, confirming what viewers knew. Two airplanes had crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack.

Then we saw the White House itself being evacuated. Some of the women removed their high heels to run more quickly. The FAA had grounded all the planes in the country. There were reports of more hijackings and of a plane crash in Pennsylvania.



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Passengers using their cell phones aboard the doomed airliners were providing most of the news to the country. Amateurs and professionals are often equal in this new age of media. I heard that the first tower had collapsed; then I saw the second tower fall, a dark flower blooming in reverse, sinking back into the earth.

At the University of Notre Dame, where I teach, classes were canceled. A memorial Mass was hastily scheduled for the afternoon. Everything was, in the way our media amplifies, speeding up. The mourning had begun, even before events had sorted themselves out.

Television is a passive medium and it often points its cameras as single-mindedly as Andy Warhol did decades ago, staring mindlessly at the Empire State Building. Recently, we had been staring mindlessly at the front door of Congressman Gary Condit's building and, in the not so distant past, at O.J.'s white Bronco, and Monica Lewinsky's black beret. Television doesn't invent anything; it is the great scavenger, evolutionarily equipped to absorb whatever passes by. When TV, largely thanks to cable, went to a twenty-four-hour, seven-days-a-week existence (not, strange as it seems, that many years ago), it just needed to stare longer.

News is now a nationwide cram session, all-nighters for the general public. What changes is what we are currently studying. The inclination of the nation as a whole is to take gut courses, the arts and entertainment curriculum, preferably with heavy doses of sex and death. But for the last few weeks the country has learned where the "-stans" are on the map of the world, and more about Islam and its subsets than 99 percent of us ever knew before.

Images, except for traumatic ones, are water off a duck's back. But the planes hitting the towers (of course, more film was eventually found, more views provided) are embedded in our collective memories.

The precedent for the TV coverage of September 11 was not the Gulf War, or even Oklahoma City. It was older, more resonant, than that—the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The kamikaze hijackers have been called many things, but foremost they were assassins.

It was assassination on a scale never before seen. And the nation's and media's response have all the earmarks of post-assassination behavior. What was murdered was the self-image of America that we had cherished. Safe, inviolate, strong.

The attacks were over quickly and accomplished by mysterious forces, faceless men, without clear rhyme or reason. Like Lee Harvey Oswald, apocalyptic motives may be discerned, full of hatred and grandiosity. But, it is no longer the lone gunman, it is a gang. Following that trail, we have been left to investigate murky underworlds, caves in Afghanistan. That has been the media's underlying narrative.

The Bush administration is calling it war and has begun to fight it that way, but it is not so much war as a search for killers and what created them. The two towers being struck, along with the Pentagon, had the emotional force of Kennedy being shot. The towers falling on live TV were like Jack Ruby shooting Lee Harvey Oswald on live television, a coda so final and devastating that it elevated the event even further into the realm of the fantastic and mythical. The parallels are everywhere, including the fact that the networks and cable news went commercial-free for four days, just as television broadcasting did when JFK was killed.

Kennedy's assassination created a deep psychological shift in America. The World Trade Center/Pentagon attack is creating one even larger, but the media's response remains the same.

Two weeks after September 11, the satirical paper *The Onion* produced this headline: "U.S. Vows to Defeat Whoever It Is We're At War With."

The TV coverage these past weeks has been not necessarily cathartic, but absolutely necessary. In its headlong pursuit of images, it has given us unforgettable mental pictures. At times, they have been raw and uncensored.

And George W. Bush, like Rudy Giuliani in New York, finally recast himself as a national leader, delivering a well-crafted speech to Congress during the week after the attack, declaring a new war on terrorism unlike any other. It is clear, regardless of whatever intellectual failings Bush may have, he has learned how to read a TelePrompTer.

Now that military strikes in Afghanistan have begun, the flow of information will be severely checked. There is no reason that Bush II won't do as well as Bush I did during the Gulf War in hobbling the press. The paradox of our oral-visual age is that, as more is made visible to a wide audience, what is kept from view becomes all the more controlled.

But television has performed a service during the first dreadful days. It has had a story as large as its appetites. Television did what it does best—it shows. And though what is merely told trails fitfully behind, more of that will catch up, in time. □

William O'Rourke's *most recent book is* Campaign America 2000: The View from the Couch *(Preview Port Editions). He is professor of English at the University of Notre Dame and a weekly political columnist for the* Chicago Sun-Times.

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Hail Mary, mother of Mexico

Mexican Phoenix
Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries
David A. Brading
Cambridge University Press, $34.95, 444 pp.

Carl L. Bankston III

In describing the history of Our Lady of Guadalupe, David A. Brading also tells the history of Mexico, impressing on readers the inseparability of the nation and its Marian tradition. The tradition has been a complicated one, marked from the beginning by controversies over the historical and theological veracity and significance of the apparition and the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. As Brading notes, cults of holy images have been the subject of a long debate in Christianity. At the beginning of the modern era, the Council of Trent (1545–63) attempted to resolve the debate by affirming the veneration of images, while guarding against idolatry by placing cults under the careful supervision of bishops. Just before Trent, Spain brought Mexico under European domination and into Christian history with the bloody conquest of the Aztecs, completed about 1521.

Christian New Spain, in Brading's account, begins with two Marian images. One was an import. The small statue of Our Lady of Los Remedios reportedly came to the New World with the conquistadors and became a symbol of Spain in America. The image of Guadalupe, on the other hand, emerged on Mexican soil and that fact helps to explain the source of its power for centuries to come.

Mexico's chief religious symbol came into existence in 1531, when the Virgin appeared to the Indian Juan Diego and imprinted her likeness on his cape. Or maybe not. The first written account of the apparition was published over a century later in a book by Miguel Sánchez in 1648. It is clear that Sánchez did not invent devotion to the Guadalupe, since there had already been sanctuaries dedicated to her. Still, the earlier silence became one of the sources of debate about the accuracy of Sánchez's account and the truth of the apparition. For the Creole clergy of New Spain, though, the Guadalupe of Sánchez became the spiritual foundation of their own homeland. In addition, Miguel Sánchez provided the beginnings of an Indian and Mestizo religious identity. Juan Diego was an Indian, and this fact drew attention to the fact that the Guadalupe Virgin had brown skin and dark hair. Just after Sanchez's version of the Guadalupe apparition, Luis Laso de la Vega published a tract containing the text known as the *Nican Mopohua*, a version of the Juan Diego story in Nahuatl.

Writers continued to attack and defend the Guadalupe story, and to offer revisionist accounts of it, but devotion to the Guadalupe became continually deeper and broader. In 1737, Our Lady of Guadalupe was officially accepted as the patron of Mexico City. The Mexican Virgin was acclaimed as the patron of all New Spain in 1746, and Pope Benedict XIV approved her election as national patron in 1754. The coronation of the image in 1895 shook Mexicans from an age of religious indifference and brought new life to the Mexican church. Ultimately, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Our Lady of Guadalupe as patron of the whole American hemisphere in 1999.

Throughout these years, the identification of the Mexican Virgin with Mexico became progressively closer. When Miguel Hidalgo raised the standard of revolt against Spanish rule in 1810, he handed out an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe to his followers, and the Indians and Mestizos who joined the movement of independence called on the Mother of Guadalupe in their fight against the Spanish. When Mexico did achieve independence in 1821 under the rule of Agustín de Iturbide, the Mexican clergy gave thanks to Our Lady of Guadalupe for saving the Mexican church from the anticlericalism of the

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Spanish Cortes. During Mexico's own periods of anticlericalism, in the nineteenth century under Juárez and the liberals, and in the twentieth century under Calles and the revolutionary forces, the Guadalupe image became a rallying point for Mexican Catholics. When the Cristeros rose up against the suppression and persecution of the church by the Calles government, they marched under flags imprinted with the Mexican Virgin. Even the anticlerical radicals often saw the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a valuable part of the popular history of the nation.

Illustrated with black-and-white plates, *Mexican Phoenix* offers a detailed and provocative discussion of a subject of central importance for all those interested in iconography, history of religion, or Mexican culture. Brading approaches his topic chiefly from the perspective of intellectual history rather than social history, and this approach has limitations. No one can treat every angle of a matter as complex as the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Still, while reading this impressive book, I often had the feeling that the most important part of the story took place away from the writing tables of the historians, theologians, and artists described by Brading. Since most of the writers were European, by ancestry or by culture, Brading tends to place his history of the Guadalupe image within a European tradition dating back to ancient controversies over iconoclasm. Only when he reaches the most recent interpreters, those influenced by liberation theology, does he consider the role of indigenous American traditions in shaping the Guadalupe devotion. Even then, the liberation theologians are often people coming out of a European background talking about indigenous people.

I have no strong ideological objection to so-called Eurocentrism. In the case of the Guadalupe image, however, we are faced with the historic expansion of religious commitment among non-Europeans. Some of the early critics of the Guadalupe devotion claimed that the native adherents were maintaining a surreptitious worship of the Tonantzin, the Aztec mother of the gods. The liberation theologians have turned this accusation on its head, finding a "Saint Mary Tonantzin" of the oppressed in the pages of the *Nican Mopohua*. Both of these kinds of claims leave open the question of how pre-Hispanic traditions, as well as those of Europe, contributed to the acceptance and the interpretation of the Guadalupe image. In addition, when Sánchez wrote the first account, the painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe already had intense popular appeal, and when Miguel Hidalgo invoked the name of Guadalupe, it was a name with profound significance for the nonliterate masses of Mexico. I wonder, then, whether the intellectuals so ably portrayed by Brading really shaped faith in Our Lady of Guadalupe, as Brading suggests, or whether these heirs to European thought were only responding to the slow growth of an indigenous, popular Christian tradition. □

Carl L. Bankson III *teaches in the sociology and anthropology department at Tulane.*

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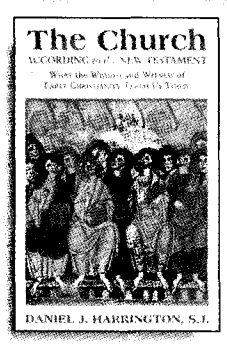

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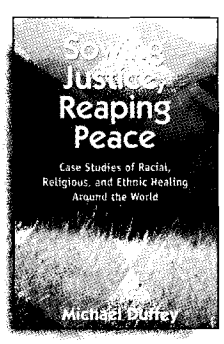

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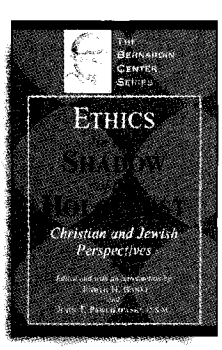

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ONE OF A KIND

Saint Francis of Assisi
G.K. Chesterton
Image Books, $10.95, 149 pp.

Salvation
Scenes from the Life of Saint Francis
Valerie Martin
Alfred A. Knopf. $24, 271 pp.

Patrick Jordan

Good stories never suffer from repetition, particularly when the storyteller is a skilled one and the story itself still pushes the edges of understanding.

From the moment of his death and canonization two years later, the saga of Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) has been retold and reshaped. Artists, writers, architects, poets, musicians, all have vied for their turn, from Giotto and Bonaventure to Kazantzakis and Messiaen. Each new storyteller has discovered in the poor man of Assisi some facet yet to be explored, a quantum calling for their artistry.

G.K. Chesterton's *Saint Francis*, first published in 1923 and happily reissued again by Image, is a classic in miniature. Superbly written, it tells us as much about Chesterton as it does about Francis Bernardone. Chesterton, a master of paradox, meets Francis, the master paradox: the one who is poorest is richest; the one who suffers Christ's Passion returns rejoicing. Chesterton's essay is quick but satisfying. It both bends one's mind and challenges one's conventions. In a few short sentences, for example, Chesterton conveys the sense of a century—its air, its texture, its fissures. Dexterously criticizing what he sees as the fateful aspects of the Franciscan project—its anarchism, for example—Chesterton nonetheless reaffirms its achievements. The Franciscan revolution, he concludes, was a necessary "spiritual earthquake."

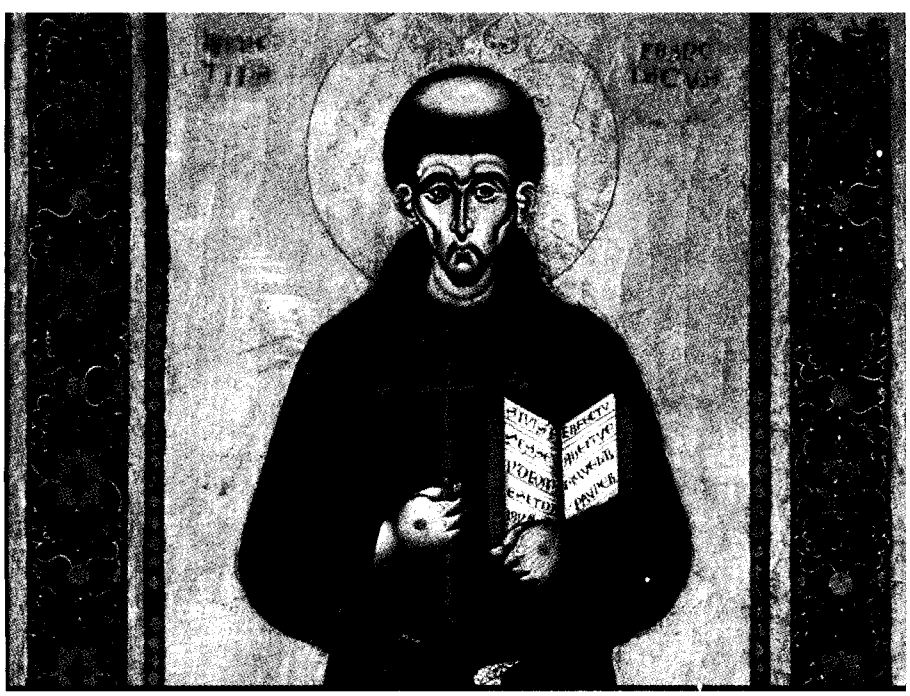
Valerie Martin's "scenes from the life of Saint Francis" is a bright, engaging pasticcio, based on a conceit. For some years a resident of Italy, the American novelist (a non-Catholic, she makes clear at the start) found herself intrigued by the episodes of Francis's life depicted in the murals she discovered in fabled Italian churches. This introduction eventually led to a deeper interest in the saint's life and to a desire to animate what she had discovered.

Martin's writing strategy has something in common with the Ignatian method of meditation. She stares intensely at a scene, immersing herself in it fully, and suddenly she and the whole thing take flight. With the tools and confidence of a novelist, she follows willingly where her characters lead—and Francis is surrounded by memorable characters. More often than not, Martin manages to land sure-footedly but still sprinting.

Her technique might also be compared to an artist's flip-through animation book. With a twist of the thumb, fingers, and wrist, the initial static frame launches into motion. For an all-too-brief moment, the whole sketch pad is flung into a dance, its characters gesturing individually and communally. Then, just as abruptly, the scene stops. We are left with a somewhat melancholy feeling that for an instant we had been privileged to witness a different moment and type of time, to see the inanimate and two-dimensional come alive, and to enjoy the exquisitely cast period costumes and actors' perfectly drawn motions. Martin also has a facility for conveying color. She has heard the insects of Umbria and breathed its dust.

There are three difficulties with Martin's writing tack, which she nevertheless surmounts. First, Francis is too large a figure to capture in a limited series of sketches. As Chesterton wrote, he was "the most original genius of the thirteenth century." While relating the essential events, Martin gives us too few to create a lasting, comprehensive impression. She might have done what Chesterton opted to do: remind the reader repeatedly that this is but a rough, limited outline of the life of a confounding, passionate man.

Second, after a brief, balanced, and



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well-footnoted introduction, Martin proceeds as if the reader now fully comprehends the scope and effect of Francis's life. For most of us, however, our grasp of Francis remains about as deep as that of the neighborhood florist: in general, it's birds and flowers. This proves a liability when Martin attempts to convey Francis's Christocentric approach to poverty, or his equally mystifying struggle to maintain bodily chastity.

Third, Martin starts literally from the back of the book—with Francis's death, blindness, and stigmata coming first. It is not until the final chapter that we confront the young Francis's initial upending moment of illumination and conversion. When the *Atlantic* published excerpts from the book last year (August 2000), the editors wisely chose to arrange the selected vignettes according to the customary chronology. It worked. But in the published book, Martin's time inversion forces her to run a two-page chronology before she even begins her introduction. It is a good thing, however, for readers will need to backtrack to the chronology repeatedly to reestablish their bearings.

Still, by the end of Martin's story—which is Francis's beginning—she has managed to vindicate her method, and with a flourish. Arriving at the final episode—Francis's youthful embrace of a leper—one is suddenly hit by a sense of all that motivated and preceded it (that is, what historically followed it). What had seemed obscure and viewed from afar finally becomes illuminated from within. It is as if having paged through a photo album from back to front, we arrive at the infant's first picture and suddenly recognize in this little form all that followed: the beauty of fresh life, the later sense of continuity and predestination, the flip in time and categories, and, in the end, a compelling sense of the whole. Valerie Martin's book has that sudden effect. It is a worthy companion to Chesterton's short classic. □

Patrick Jordan *is* Commonweal*'s managing editor.*

MONARCHY, ANYONE?

Christian Faith and Modern Democracy
God and Politics in the Fallen World
Robert P. Kraynak
University of Notre Dame Press, $24.95, 307 pp.

Patrick J. Deneen

Alexis de Tocqueville begins *Democracy in America* with what seem to be contradictory observations. Tocqueville considers the modern emergence of democracy to be "a providential fact," and argues that the attempt to halt it would require one "to struggle against God himself." On the other hand, Tocqueville regards this heaven-sent political development with "a sort of religious terror" that is "produced by the sight of this irresistible revolution...that one sees still advancing today amid the ruins it has made." Democracy is inevitable and terrible, something to be embraced and feared.

Robert Kraynak, a professor of political philosophy at Colgate University, shares Tocqueville's religiously inspired terror of democracy, but breaks with Tocqueville over democracy's inevitability. In his important and controversial new book, Kraynak argues that democracy is the result of several historical and political developments that were not in themselves the inevitable result of either Providence or the secular course of history.

Like Tocqueville, Kraynak views democracy with deep misgivings. He is skeptical about liberal democracy's tendency to encourage the belief in a human-centered universe, its inculcation of materialism, rights-based individualism, growth-oriented capitalism, dissolute mass culture, and, above all, Kantian-inspired claims to human autonomy that leave questions of ultimate human good to the untutored judgment of the individual. The modern esteem for democracy, as well as the modern disdain for aristocracy and monarchy, should be reconsidered, he says.

Writing explicitly as a Catholic thinker, Kraynak directs his critique at two audiences, namely "secularists" and "committed [Christian] believers." To the former he contends that "modern liberal democracy needs the Christian religion to support its institutions and to provide a grounding for its deepest moral claims." He seeks to persuade the latter that "Christianity is not necessarily a liberal or democratic religion, nor does it make support of a political order its highest priority." Committed secular thinkers will summarily and too quickly dismiss Kraynak's deeply antiliberal

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arguments. Christians, particularly conservative believers, will find Kraynak's arguments more challenging and potentially persuasive, particularly his contention that modern Christianity has too readily accepted the idea that democratic equality is a reflection of Christian doctrine. Although it has been incorporated in official Catholic teaching in no less than the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the modern interpretation concerning democracy's Christian roots departs radically from the biblical and canonical tradition. According to Kraynak, that tradition allows for, even appears to demand, ranked political orders that reflect hierarchies in the divine order.

In that context, Kraynak calls for a revival of the Augustinian doctrine of the Two Cities. Augustine understood the two realms—the City of God and the City of Man—to be radically divided. The City of Man is a world of profound imperfection, peopled by fallen, sinful beings who can only hope for ultimate citizenship in the City of God through an earthly life of piety. We exist in the City of Man as pilgrims whose sight should remain fixed on the ultimate destination, and it behooves us not to be distracted by thoughts of perfecting or even too ambitiously seeking improvement of the fallen human city. We prudentially accept political arrangements that secure peace without overly emphasizing temporal justice, as perfect justice is possible only in heaven. Governments are judged by the standards of the divine, not the earthly; hence, while no polity is good in itself, those regimes that ensure domestic tranquillity—point us toward a moral life, limit our ambitions and craven desires, and most important, do not interfere in our ultimate aim of participating in the world to come—are praiseworthy from a Christian standpoint. Inasmuch as modern democracy emphasizes temporal satisfaction and social justice, in Kraynak's view it fails the crucial Augustinian test of legitimacy.

Kraynak's neo-Augustinianism has many virtues. It encourages a conception of government that attends to the moral character of its citizens while

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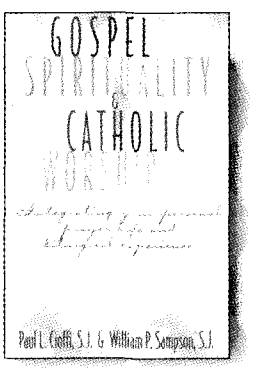

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strenuously opposing modern totalitarianisms that attempt to absorb civil society or theocratic regimes that try to absorb the state. Kraynak continually points out the morally corrosive tendencies of modern liberal democracy, suggesting at each turn the need to correct purely material conceptions of human flourishing. Unlike many conservatives, he gives equal time to a critique of capitalism—its ravages on human communities, its promotion of a thoroughgoing materialism, and its pervasive inculcation of relativism.

Kraynak is correct to remind Christians that they should grant only provisional allegiance to any regime. However, his attempt to revive a "mixed" model of Christian constitutionalism that includes elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and popular sovereignty is unacceptable by non-Christian standards, and finally dubious according to the same Christian standard that he invokes. In the first and most obvious instance, Kraynak at no point discusses whether a Christian standard can be shared in a religiously heterogeneous society. At least Augustine and Aquinas discussed the manner by which Christian princes should deal with non-Christians (to oversimplify, grudging tolerance and sometimes forced conversion) and apostates (death). Kraynak altogether avoids this essential topic.

Moreover, Kraynak seems unnecessarily hostile to a democracy that could be deemed an exemplary regime from a Christian perspective, and one that non-Christians could find similarly appealing. He is right to remind us that Augustine in the main regarded political regimes as enormous "robber gangs"; however, he passes too quickly over Augustine's endorsement of small republics for their closer approximation to a justice on earth. Augustine in various instances praises the ancient republican ideal for its attempt to constrain human ambitions, particularly the cravings for empire and expansion of material wealth. He spoke admiringly of the conception of "commonwealth" animated by "a common sense of right," including the virtues of self-rule, mutual restraint, and an abiding regard for other humans.

One finds a more positive endorsement of democracy for similar reasons in Tocqueville. In spite of his "religious terror," Tocqueville believed that democracy had internal resources by which it could resist corrosive tendencies toward atomism. He placed great hope in the existence of an active civil society, in which citizens would take into account the situations, interests, desires, and passions of others, and thereby partially overcome selfishness and pride. Kraynak's hostility toward skeptical and individualistic liberalism inclines him to overlook the virtues of democracy. By his own standards—for potentially cultivating a sense of common good, promoting ennobling forms of self-sacrifice, and restraining self-interest—democracy offers to Christians a regime deserving of our best efforts and even our devotion. □

Patrick J. Deneen *teaches political philosophy at Princeton University.*

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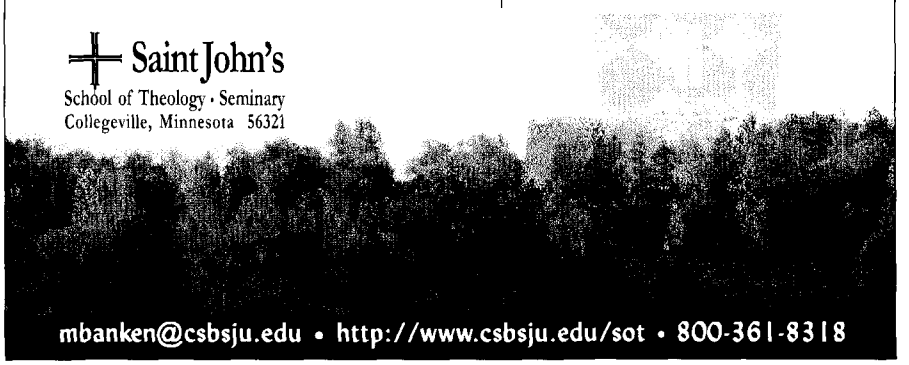

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Disastrous policy

Until I read William Pfaff's comment about the September 11 attacks ("Beware the Jackals," September 28), "The immediate conclusion nearly everyone has drawn...is that they come out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," I thought that King Abdullah of Jordan and I were the only people in the world who had come to that conclusion since the American broadcast industry, as I heard it, rarely made that point.

Instead, as an example, I saw former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu all over the tube saying the attacks had nothing to do with the conflict and blaming it all on Islamic fundamentalism. Tens of thousands of bereaved innocent Americans have paid for an American foreign policy that has proved literally disastrous. We have supported a colonial power and state-sanctioned terrorism against the Palestinians. Are the West Bank and Gaza worth what we have suffered?

JOSEPH D. POLICANO
East Hampton, N.Y.

Honest broker

I must disagree with William Pfaff's statement in the September 28th issue that "for more than thirty years, the United States has refused to make a genuinely impartial effort to find a resolution to [the Israeli-Palestinian] conflict."

For most of Israel's (post-1948) history, it was impossible to separate the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians from the broader conflict between Israel and the Arab nations surrounding it. These nations were rhetorically committed to Israel's destruction and engaged in both direct military action against Israel and supported military action by nonstate actors, such as the PLO and its various splinter groups.

Thus, there was never any likelihood that a long-term settlement between Israel and the Palestinians

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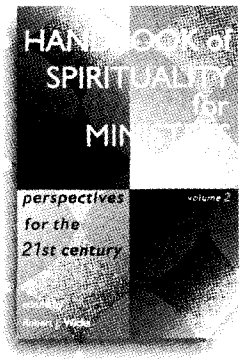

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October 25, 2001, 7:30PM
Enda McDonagh, D.D., D.C.L.
Theologian, Author, Professor Emeritus, Maynooth University, Dublin
"The Risk of God"

November 29, 2001, 7:30 PM
Cardinal Godfried Danneels
Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussel, Belgium

February 28, 2002, 7:30 PM
Mary Gordon
Professor, Barnard College, Feminist, Author

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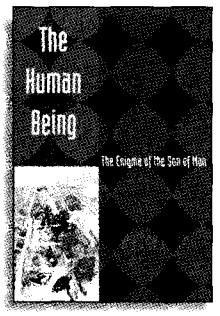

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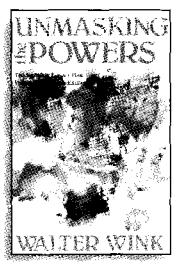

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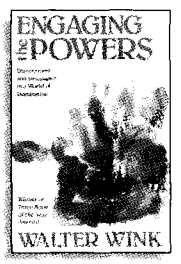

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could be reached until a lasting peace could be achieved between Israel and its neighbors. U.S. support of Israel was important in this regard, because it convinced Israel's neighbors that the Jewish state could not be defeated militarily. However, the United States also played an important role in facilitating the negotiations between the Israelis and Egyptians that led to the 1979 Camp David accord.

The recent history of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is well known, and I am astounded that Pfaff does not believe that the United States has worked hard to move both parties toward a just and lasting settlement. The deal that Prime Minister Ehud Barak proposed at Camp David in 2000 made significant Israeli concessions on almost all issues (in fairness, Chairman Yasir Arafat made a number of important concessions as well). That an agreement was not reached was indeed regrettable. President Bill Clinton may have made some tactical mistakes in structuring the negotiations the way he did, but his failure was not due to his lack of impartiality.

The people most responsible for the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process are the Israelis and the Palestinians, not the United States. It is a fantasy to think that the United States can snap its fingers and force Israel or the Palestinians to accept our vision of a just settlement. Ultimately, peace is in their hands, not ours.

J. PETER NIXON
Concord, Calif.

Measure for measure

I agree wholeheartedly with your editorial comments ("September 11, 2001," September 28) urging caution and a proportionate and measured response to the September 11 tragedy.

The best measured response would be an expenditure of several billion dollars on both diplomatic approaches and real, tangible aid to our Muslim neighbors in the world and also to all the other struggling third-world countries. Our country's insularity from world events and peoples is scandalous. No wonder we are distrusted and even hated by so many.

MIKE EVANS
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BIG CITY, SMALL TOWN

Peter Feuerherd

For the past ten years I have been a proud participant in the oldest established pickup basketball game in New York City. The history of The Game goes back decades. I'm told there has been a game, weather permitting (and sometimes even when it's not weather-permitting), for some twenty-five years. The tradition continues each Saturday beginning at 8:30 A.M. at Crowley Park, near the site of the former gas tanks next to the Long Island Expressway in Elmhurst, Queens. (You better come earlier if you want to get a game in the good weather, however, and be prepared to sustain some minor bruises, scratches, and an occasional elbow in the gut if you dare go near the basket.)

For much of my first four years with The Game, I would report to my spouse stories about the dozen or so regulars. There was the Jewish real estate guy with the great outside shot; the Chinese computer techie whose game kept getting better; the Panamanian with a quick move to the basket.

I would describe them, using ethnic "handles" and occupations, and my wife would look dumbfounded. "You don't even know most of those guys' names, do you?" She was right, I sheepishly admitted.

A female friend told me how different the socializing would be if The Game were an all-women activity. "We would have had a contact list. We would have already invited everyone over for tea. We would have had them meet our children."

Guys move a little slowly on the social front, however. And it has always been a kind of big-city tradition. There are lots of people you come in contact with in New York. They are part of the landscape, in some ways a regular part of your life, like the newsstand vendor you buy the *Post* from every morning. Yet most times you never trouble to know their names.

Still, by the fifth year or so of my participation in The Game, I had gotten to know all the regulars' names. At least their first names. And we actually had conversations.

Ever so slowly, I began to find out that these guys had lives beyond the hard court. When Benny died, a guy who I'm told played for NYU back in the '40s and practiced the art of trash-talking to perfection, we heard about it. Benny was Jewish, however, and so the ancient custom of quick burial applied. We didn't make the funeral.

But when we heard of the death of the young daughter of Joe, the Italian Catholic, most of us made it to the wake in a show of solidarity appreciated by our grieving fellow weekend warrior.

The glimpses of other outside lives also began to emerge. Curtis, our tallest player, moved to Oklahoma for a year, only to return after his wife passed away. He worked as an accountant downtown.

As I got to know them, they got to know about me. Once, I let on that I wrote for Catholic publications and, for weeks, my moniker was "Father." My foul calls were argued with accusations that, as a Catholic writer, I was just maybe a wee bit hypocritical to unjustly accuse others of rule violations.

As my son got older and taller—he is now a college sophomore—I involved him in The Game. John, the guy from Brooklyn who pedals his bike over every weekend, would teach my gangly boy how to assert himself under the boards. And so it continued.

It has been hyperbolically asserted in the weeks after September 11 that everything about life in New York would change. Not quite. The Game continues, I can attest.

Yet there is a different edge. Last week someone asked, "Where's Curtis?" And then another asked, "Where's John?" They are simple questions. But such routine inquiries in today's New York are no longer so simple. We haven't seen those guys since before September 11.

They might be on vacation. They might just be sleeping in late on weekend mornings. They just might have gotten tired over all the foul calls and bickering that have marked The Game since its inception. Maybe it's possible that someone could actually get tired of basketball, unlikely as that might seem to the rest of us.

Still, in the back of our minds is the thought that maybe they were in the wrong place at the wrong time on a sunny New York morning a few weeks ago. It is a thought too horrible to contemplate aloud. Nobody mentions it, but I'm sure I'm not the only one thinking it.

Every Saturday morning I look for John and Curtis to show up. I hope it happens next week. Until then, I just wish I had bothered to break through the anonymity of big-city life at least once and gotten a phone number or a last name.

Before September 11, who would have thought such information would have loomed so large? Curtis and John, if you are out there, The Game is waiting. □

Peter Feuerherd *writes frequently for* Commonweal.

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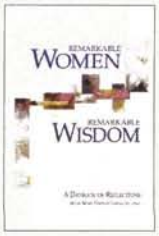

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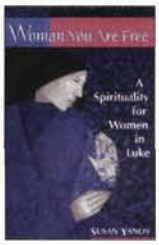
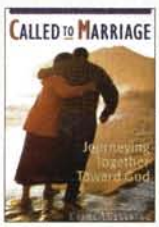


Woman, You are Free

A Spirituality for Women in Luke

Susan Yanos

Susan Yanos here explores what liberation means for women—personally, socially, spiritually—not as an ideological feminist but as a critical thinker trying to make sense of her life. Beginning with an in-depth look at the story of Martha and Mary in Part One, Yanos guides the reader into an examination of how women have related to God and how Jesus relates to women in Luke's Gospel and Acts. Part Two guides the reader toward a response to the radical freedom Jesus offers, focusing "less on serving God and more on letting God serve us." Part Three explores women's social and political power and how they can claim and use that power properly, performing "true acts of goodness rather than acts of do-goodism." **B4131 $8.95**

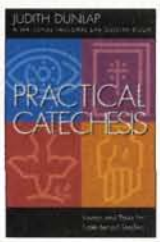


Called to Marriage

Journeying Together Toward God

Carol Luebering

Though we human beings often see marriage as a means of fulfilling earthly longings, Carol Luebering shows us how union with a spouse helps us fulfill spiritual longings as well, and, indeed, may bring us to communion with God. The intimate knowing of another human being, she says, is our approach to learning the nature of God. In an Introduction, six chapters and a postscript, we look back with the author at our experience and to see how it has led us in this way. Each chapter ends with questions for reflection. The book is designed to help the reader reflect, alone or with a spouse, on "what God has already written across the map of your own married life." **B3895 $6.95**



Practical Catechesis

Visions and Tasks for Catechetical Leaders

Judith Dunlap
With the National Pastoral Life Center

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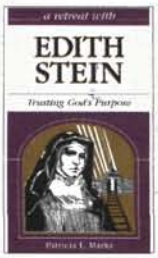
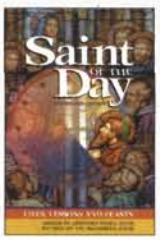


A Retreat With Edith Stein

Trusting God's Purpose

Patricia L. Marks

In this seven-day retreat, *Trusting God's Purpose*, your director is Edith Stein, a woman of deep intellect and an intense commitment to the truth. Born into a Jewish family, Edith's search for truth led her first to agnosticism and eventually to Catholicism and life as a Carmelite nun. Both her heritage and her faith made her an enemy of the Third Reich and a victim of the Holocaust. On this journey with Edith, you will confront the central issues of life: understanding the will of God, living in right relationship with others and finding fulfillment in self-donation. Edith's philosophy is simple: Ultimately we all live at the hand of God, the wise among us will accept and cherish this fact and trust in God's purpose. **B3879 $8.95**



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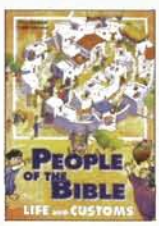

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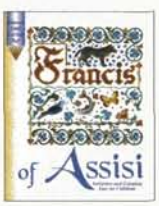

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